

Summer's pied pipers: Music of ice cream truck irresistible to children

By *AMY HOAK - H&R Staff Writer*

MACON - The quiet streets of Macon aren't used to the twinkling music, punctuated by animal noises or silly hellos.

Still, almost as if by instinct, children know what to do when they hear the music"box sounds cut through the humid summer air. They turn their bicycles in the direction of home and wave toward the white truck floating through the neighborhood.

The assignment: get money. The reward: an ice cream treat.

If you think you're seeing more ice cream trucks around lately, you're right.

Frosty Treats, a Kansas City, Mo.-based company that operates ice cream trucks, upped the number of its vehicles in the Decatur area from one to three this summer. Apparently, Decatur loves its ice cream.

"Decatur is our most productive area," said Shannon Houston, sales manager in a company satellite office in Rochester.

Wednesday, it was part-timer Mark Guzouskis weaving through the side streets with his vanload of Bomb Pops and fudge bars. He started the day in Macon.

A former Prudential Financial employee, Guzouskis sits in the cab of a sweltering van for a shift that starts at about noon and ends when it's dark. The departure from the insurance industry has its benefits.

"It's still sales, but at least now it's something tangible. People come to me instead of me coming to them - that's a nice change," he said.

But his day isn't all fun and treats. Before he even begins selling ice cream, he drives from his Lincoln home to Rochester to pick up a goody filled truck. He works on commission; he pays for his own gasoline, a cost that usually hits \$30 to \$40 a day.

The weather can be a friend or a foe. If it's too hot, kids stay in the air-conditioning, making it more difficult for them to hear his melodic calling card.

Guzouskis, who at 47 said he's "semi-retired," took the job to make extra money on weekends and one day during the week. He has been on the job for a few weeks now and said he does it because he likes kids.

Liking kids - and having the patience to deal with them - is a requirement of the job, said Houston. As a safety measure, drivers are given full background checks before they're put behind the wheel.

Indeed, children made up a good portion of the ice cream man's clientele throughout the Macon neighborhoods.

Eighteen-month-old Nevaeh McFall, a pacifier in her mouth, indicated her ice cream choice Wednesday by pointing to a photo of a chocolate crunch bar on the side of the truck. Minutes after 6-year-old Keirsten Day heard the "beautiful sound" pass her house, her mother bought her a multicolored snow cone.

But even big kids are charmed by the nostalgic noises.

Marcella Lukens heard the music and rushed out to obtain a snow cone for her 88-year-old mother, Stella Panchot.

"She loves these things," Lukens said.

Unfortunately, the money-making sound easily can become annoying for the driver.

Ice cream men or women do well with selective hearing skills; after enough time on the job, they learn to tune out the sound, Guzouskis said. Twelve different tunes can be played from his vehicle, but the jack-in-the-box pitch never changes.

Amy Hoak can be reached at ahoak@herald-review.com or 421-7972.