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The best job in the country

A&M instructor loves position as designated ice cream taster

By James A. Johnson

CORRESPONDENT

Brenda Bracewell loves her job, and anyone even vaguely familiar with the spreading popularity of Blue Bell ice cream could easily understand why. She eats ice cream for a living.

Hundreds of Blue Bell employees work with technical dairy machinery, box novelties and deliver ice cream to stores from El Paso to Corpus Christi. But the surprisingly slim Bracewell is the one who makes certain the customer will like it.

She is the official Blue Bell ice cream taster.

Although the world of dairy science was somewhat new to Bracewell before she attained her position as Blue Bell's research and development director, the world of food services is one that she has been familiar with all her life. Throughout her childhood, her parents owned and managed a meat market in her native Elgin, TX.

Bracewell said the usual reaction she gets from people once they realize her lifelong connection to food is typical.

"People always react by saying, 'So that's where you get your interest in the food business,'" she said.

Bracewell was hired by Blue Bell in November 1980, less than a year after graduating from Texas A&M with a degree in dairy science and technology.

She said a friend informed her the Brenham creamery was considering the adoption of such a position. Within weeks, Bracewell was hired as Blue Bell's first director of research and development. And since that time, she has utilized her knowledge in dairy nutrition in a job many would love.

Bracewell, a registered dietician, usually works an 8-to-5 day, but when a new flavor or product proposal is being processed for the first time, she reports for duty as early as 3 a.m.

"If there's one thing I don't mind doing at such a wee hour in the morning, it's getting up to taste ice cream," she said while glancing at

the 20 or more half-gallon containers used to decorate the shelves in her office.

Even though she tastes ice cream nearly every day, Bracewell explained that she never gets tired of it, even when she's off duty.

"Sometimes I even find myself craving it," she said. "But I guess with a position such as mine, if I didn't care for ice cream, I wouldn't be here."

Bracewell said an average workday sometimes involves evaluating five or six flavors, often for originality of new products. If there ever comes a time when she does not think a certain kind of ice cream meets Blue Bell's standards, the flavor is often either mixed with another syrup or candy until it tastes right.

Another of Bracewell's jobs is to taste potential ice cream ingredients, the most popular of which is chocolate. She said chocolate factories around the country compete for the chance to have their brand included in Blue Bell's ice cream.

Once her staff decides whether or not a new product is tasty enough, they report to the top officials with hopes it will be sold across Texas.

Bracewell said she enjoys Blue Bell's teamwork approach.

"It's really exciting and fun to work for a company and watch it expand and progress," she said. "I have a great staff here and the way we work together is unique. Coming to work is never like a chore because each day we achieve something new."

In addition to her daily routine at

the creamery, Bracewell helps a dairy science class at A&M course deals with studies in properties, dairy ingredients, emulsifying, freeze processing, microbiology, and detecting ice cream flavors.

The course's objective is to train the students what pertains to such as Bracewell's so they will know what is expected of them if they have a similar job.

As many might expect, she is asked which of the numerous flavors of ice cream is her favorite.

"It surprises people when I answer them, considering how many flavors I've tasted over the years," Bracewell said. "Homemade is by far my favorite," she said smiling, "but orange sherbert is very close second."

Aspartame hits Texas freezers in Blue Bell diet ice cream line

By Holly Beeson

REPORTER

If you love ice cream, but can do without the calories, here's some good news: Now you can have your ice cream and eat it too.

Blue Bell is the first company in the United States to market large containers of ice cream made with aspartame. The artificial sweetener is better known by its brand name NutraSweet. Blue Bell's new diet line has about half the calories of its gold rim supreme ice cream at a comparative cost.

The ice cream is available in vanilla, strawberries and cream, pineapples and cream, neapolitan and Dutch chocolate. Peach will be introduced in the fall.

"We started the diet line because we've had so many requests from consumers," Ed Kruse, chairman and chief executive officer of Blue Bell, said. "Everyone wants an ice

cream that tastes good without a lot of calories."

The company started working on the diet line in July of last year, about the time the Food and Drug Administration allowed aspartame to be used in a product that simulates ice cream in a large container.

"We are primarily targeting people who want to watch their cal-

ories," Kruse said. "There will also be a great number of diabetics looking at this product."

The diet line hit the market Jan. 9, and sales have been higher than expected.

"We anticipated this product would run around 16 percent of our half-gallon volume over a one-year

period," Kruse said. "But right now it's running about 25 percent."

He said a great number of people are trying the product for the first time and he expects sales to go down at a later date.

Blue Bell also is establishing an out-of-state distribution branch in Baton Rouge, La. to begin serving that area in September.

"Several years from now, we plan to have a manufacturing plant in Tulsa, Okla.," Kruse said. "It's an excellent location to help us expand our business."

"We don't think we should give anybody in the United States from having our product if it's available for us to go there."



Study Abroad lets students view world

By Sherri Roberts

STAFF WRITER

Rather than a Harrington classroom, Blocker or the Academic Building, Nairobi, East Berlin and Pompeii will be classroom settings for some Texas A&M students earning academic credit this summer.

The Study Abroad Office offers students the opportunity to earn academic credit while immersing themselves in the culture of a foreign country through various programs, including exchange and summer study abroad programs.

In conjunction with the Colleges of Liberal Arts, Architecture and Environmental Design, Agriculture, and Business Administration, the Study Abroad Office offers programs this summer in countries such as Kenya, Italy, the Soviet Union and France. In addition, a graduate-level program will be offered in Australia and New Zealand in coordination with the College of Education.

The six-week programs cost about \$3,000, including airfare, lodging, and some meals, but excluding tuition, fees and personal expenses. Tuition is comparable to what would be paid for on-campus classes.

Proficiency in the primary language of the host country is necessary only for summer programs offered through the Department of Modern Languages. Students participating in these programs must complete the first two semesters in the host country's language, with a minimum grade of a "B" received in the second course.

Arnold Kramer, professor of history, is taking 18 students to Germany this summer, where they will study History 402, History of Modern Germany since 1815.

"It makes history so much more alive," he said. "You're standing right there where these things took place."

Kramer's students will spend six weeks in Germany visiting museums, castles, cathedrals and folk festivals in towns such as Tübingen, Munich and West Berlin. Students also will have a guided tour through communist-governed East Berlin.

Kramer said students will attend class for one hour in the morning, Monday through Thursday, and take field trips every other day to the locations they are studying.

"I've never met a student who didn't come back saying it was the experience of their lives," Kramer said of the programs.

"You learn about yourself, what your interests are, and how to deal with people from other cultures," he said.

The program is flexible, he said, in that students from any discipline can arrange to study areas of interest to them within the country they are visiting.

Kramer said arrangements are being made for a health education major who is participating in the program to visit various German hospitals.

Elizabeth Edmondson, a senior speech communications major, participated in a liberal arts study abroad program to Scotland and England in Summer 1987.

Edmondson said professors of her English, history and geography classes met with students the first day of their trip, gave them a list of churches, museums and other landmarks, and instructed them to travel to the sites on their own.

"I grew up a lot because I had to be responsible for myself," she said.

Edmondson said the experience was unique at first because she was unfamiliar with the gland's transportation schedules and money system.

During the afternoons and weekends, students had free from class, they would take a rail pass to visit nearby towns and cities.

She recalled that on a visit to a small town in Scotland, the townspeople were celebrating "Lifeboat Day" at the harbor. They were brating the lifeboat, complete with a life princess, she said.

Edmondson said returning to a fast-paced environment and the responsibilities awaiting at A&M in the fall was another difficult adjustment. Studying in England and Scotland was surely and allowed her time to reflect on the studies in relation to the culture, she said.

Students interested in these year-long programs must have a minimum grade-point average of 3.0 and written and oral proficiency in the language of the country in which they study.

The University coordinates exchange programs with Tubingen University in Germany, State University in Scotland, and Monterrey Institute of Technology in Mexico.

Mona Rizk-Finne, director of Study Abroad administration, said students who participate in the program often have a competitive edge over others in a job situation.

The Study Abroad Office will feature an open seas day to inform students about international opportunities from 10 a.m.-2 p.m. Feb. 14 on the first floor of the MSC.

In addition, information about overseas study opportunities can be found in the Study Abroad Library in 161 Bizzell West.

For more information, call 843-0544.

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