

15 MINUTES

Monica Scott keeps blizzards where they belong – at Dairy Queen

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The summery, sumptuous amalgam of soft serve ice cream and candy in a Dairy Queen Blizzard may in fact be held upside down in its cup without spilling. But don't try that at home; instead, leave this demonstration to professionals, like Training Manager Monica Scott, who showed off the dense properties of the famous Blizzard at the DQ Grill & Chill on Colonial Boulevard in Fort Myers.

Last Monday morning at 9:30 a.m. was, for her, the calm before the blizzards and burgers are served to long lines at the drive-thru and the lobby fills up with customers. The restaurant opens at 10 a.m.

"The lobby is the most important part of the store," she explained, as she would to a new employee. "It's where first impressions are made. We wanna keep it clean, neat and organized."

Beyond the lobby, all bright under fluorescent lights: a shiny expo counter where hot food is trayed and soft serve machines waiting to spurt vanilla, chocolate and swirl; the blizzard candies were stocked, the liquid topping containers topped off, a cook put the day's first burgers on a flat-top grill, two fryers waited to be manned and a "prep island" was filled to overflow with fresh sandwich toppings.

Part of Scott's job is to train employees for jobs cooking, cashiering and working the drive-thru at the eight "Grill and Chill" locations in Florida. Her boss, Ron Kraus, owns them (he also owns DQ's in Missouri, Minnesota and Iowa) and Scott goes wherever he tells her – sometimes to help open a

new one, sometimes to just act as manager. In her five years with the chain, she's helped open DQ's in Fort Myers, Lehigh Acres and Venice, where she hired and trained new crews.

"First day jitters – everybody has," Scott said. "Don't be nervous, just do your best, it's all we can ask for..."

"Sometimes it doesn't work out. The restaurant business is not for everybody."

Besides a stint at K-Mart, the restaurant business has been a means to make a living most of her life, Scott, 39, said. She grew up working with her mom, dad, brothers, sisters and cousins in a small, smorgasbord style restaurant called Hickory Lane. It was near Connersville, Ind., halfway between Indianapolis and Cincinnati, Ohio.

"You had to know how to get there," she said. "It was about 15 miles from any town. You had to take all country roads. We did have big signs out on (State Road 44)."

That restaurant burned to the ground in 1991, a fire sparked by faulty wiring.

"When copper wiring was scarce in the 1970s, they put aluminum wires in," Scott said. "It was from an air conditioning unit that wasn't even turned on."

The family reopened the business in nearby Metamora, Ind. in an old train depot, where Scott was the general manager. It lasted about six years.

"The owner was just nickel-and-diming us and we closed in 1997," she said.

Not long after that she moved to Fort Myers, because she already knew the area well. Her parents would close down Hickory Lane every year right before Christmas, take the kids out of school and re-enroll them in Florida, then take them back to Indiana in



FLORIDA WEEKLY PHOTO EVAN WILLIAMS

DQ Grill & Chill Training Manager Monica Scott.

the Spring.

"Fort Myers has been our kind of home away from home for 25 years," Scott said.

Now her parents live in Fort Myers nearby the old house Scott's grandparents owned on Fort Myers Beach. And she's still working hard to get customer's their blizzards nice and thick, or that extra tomato they like on their burger.

Her personal favorite? The banana blizzard, Scott said. "I love the banana pudding you make at home with the vanilla wafers. It tastes just like that." ■

When she's not working, Scott enjoys time with her four dogs – all a mix of Cocker spaniel and Poodle. Her hobby and most recent New Year's Eve resolution, is seeing more of Florida. To that end she's toured various local landmarks, including the Fort Myers Historical Museum ("You've gotta check it out," she said), the Calusa Nature Center and the Naples Zoo. Occasionally, she visits Indiana.

"I love the change of seasons, but only Fall, with all the leaves," she said. "I can't handle the cold anymore." ■

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