

Ice Cream Man Gives it Away

By Andy Sternberg

Since 2004, a Los Angeles-area man has made it his mission to give away half a million ice creams for free around the world. Andy Sternberg met up with Ice Cream Man to find out more.

On a hot, October Saturday in South Central Los Angeles, a group of boys and girls, aged 9-15 jumped around after wrapping up a high impact, low fidelity music video shoot at a local non-profit Arts center.

In rolled relief in the form of Matt Allen, driving his Vintage 1969 Ice Cream truck, nicknamed “Bessie.”

For over two years, Allen has been known around the world as Ice Cream Man, logging over 20,000 miles and giving away at least 60,000 ice creams.



The 32-year-old Allen was in-between jobs and spending his free time doing what he enjoys best – hiking the length of the Appalachian Trail – when he had a sort of epiphany.

Doubting he was going to get rich by simply “working for the man,” Allen realized that he could see the world and spread happiness if he followed through with a unique and marketable idea. “If I give away a half million ice creams, that would be half a million smiles,” he reasoned.

So Allen, a college graduate with a business degree, took out a loan and bought a used ice cream truck and relocated from Ashland, Oregon to his mother’s house in Long Beach where he could save money while slinging free ice cream to the masses.

Allen needed sponsors. He wanted Ice Cream Man to be profitable and prove that it’s possible to make money by giving away free goods. So he decided he had to become famous.

“We live in the best place in the world at the best time in history,” said Allen over coffee in between stops at A Place Called Home and the Arthur Nights music festival downtown. “If you’re not gonna do it now, what are you waiting for?”

With the help of sponsors and up to 100 volunteers, Ice Cream Man served up free treats backstage at dozens of festivals across the country over the past year and a half. The ensuing publicity – including feature articles in the *Austin Chronicle* and *Los Angeles Times* – combined with extensive festival reviews and photos taken by Allen and his volunteers at <http://icecreamman.com>, brought Ice Cream Man this fame.

But after six or seven years as Ice Cream Man, Allen plans to move on to other projects.

“I really want to create an extremely transparent business, to show especially younger people that you can take a completely non-traditional idea like free ice cream and explain how it worked and how it didn’t and why,” said Allen.

Ice Cream Man is well on his way to giving away half a million ice creams. He says he won’t be disappointed if he runs out of money but is more ambitious when considering the possibility of a corporation, cable channel, or philanthropist buying him out and taking the free ice cream for sponsorship model to a new level.

“My goal in life is to be the happiest person on Earth.”

As he serves up seconds to the kids and explains the Ice Cream Man business plan to the president of the non-profit Live Arts Group, it seems that Allen is destined to succeed.