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Polar Scoops ice cream shops to open

By Tom Grace

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COOPERSTOWN _ Griffin Gillette's ice cream business, Polar Scoops, is poised to open Saturday in the former Java Joe's restaurant on state Route 28, just south of Cooperstown.

About three weeks from now, Polar Scoops will open a second store in the former Burger King restaurant on state Route 7 in Oneonta.

Gillette, who received a \$100,000 low-interest loan from the Otsego County Board of Representatives last week, said Monday he is hiring people to staff the two facilities.

"We'll have 33 people, including five managers," he said. A crew of 11 tradesmen is working to ready the Polar Scoops shops for their openings, he said.

In time, the business will grow, selling ice cream across the state and bringing more jobs to Oneonta, Gillette said Monday.

Until recently, he had planned to call his business Polar Bear Homemade Ice Cream, a venerable name in Oneonta. But when Jamie Potter and Janet Powers of Otego learned of Gillette's plans, they were perturbed, because they sell Polar Bear Homemade Ice Cream at their seasonal fresh foods shop in Otego, Pie In The Sky.

For decades, Polar Bear ice cream had been sold in Oneonta from a store at 437 Main St., which is now occupied by the Phoenix Cafe. In the mid-1990s, Potter and Powers purchased the machines that had made Polar Bear Homemade Ice Cream and the polar bear sign that had adorned the store. They moved the operation to Otego as part of Pie In The Sky.

Gillette, a 1986 graduate of Oneonta High School, grew up enjoying Polar Bear Homemade Ice Cream and wanted the trademark as part of his marketing plan. After he applied for the trademark with the U.S. Patent & Trademark Office, Potter and Powers asked for an extension of time and made it known they would oppose the application, Potter said.

Gillette said that although he was on track to be granted the trademark, common law

recognizes long-time usage in a restricted area, even if proprietors haven't applied for a trademark, which Potter and Powers have not.

"I could have used it in 49 states but not New York, so we've just changed the name," he said Monday.

Otsego County Economic Developer Carolyn Lewis said the trademark remains unclaimed, and Gillette's corporation will continue to be titled Polar Bear Homemade Ice Cream Inc., but he will be doing business as Polar Scoops.

"We made the loan to Polar Bear Homemade Ice Cream, which is a valid company in the state of New York," she said.

The county made the loan because "he presented us with an extremely well-thought-out business plan that had tremendous economic potential and significant job creation," she said.

"He currently has 33 people that he's going to put to work between the Oneonta and Cooperstown stores and has agreements for production of high-quality ice cream.

"I think he's going to do very well."