

Inside story



The Five People You Meet in Heaven screens in valley
Page 21



Check your fuel tanks before you fill them
Page 23



NYS's grid can accept much more wind power - today
Page 25

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Hudson Valley

BUSINESS JOURNAL

Gillette Creamery named Ulster's 'Entrepreneur of the Year'

BY THERESA KEEGAN

It's a banner year for the Gillette family: a huge company expansion and also being selected as the Entrepreneur of the Year in Ulster County.

"I'm extremely excited about it," says J.B. Gillette, one of the four brothers who run Gillette Creamery, eastern New York's largest ice cream distributor. "We were absolutely shocked when the call came."

The annual award is presented by the Ulster County Regional Chamber of Commerce and the Ulster County

26 trucks, 3,000 accounts and operates in 19 counties. It is expanding from its Ellenville site to a new warehouse in Gardiner by the end of the year. The location was critical to keep the employee base, said J.B., and while the economy didn't necessarily cooperate with the expansion, plans are full-bore ahead.

"We're just always committed to doing it better than anyone else," he says of the company, "and it's ice cream. You need to have fun."

Passion for the business is also an

was named Best Craft Brew in New York in 2009. Its Mother's Milk Stout was named one of the top 10 stout beers in North America by the New York Times.

Keegan Ales has a strong commitment to the community, having donated about 5,000 gallons of beer for local charity events and even offered up a quarter-acre of its property for use as a vegetable garden for the Queens Galley soup kitchen.

Cultural Business of the Year — Catskill Ballet Theatre in Kingston is a nonprofit organization founded in 1980 by

artistic director Anne Hebard and artistic adviser David Howard. The company stages performances in theaters and schools in a five-county region, making it possible for children to be exposed to classical ballet, with original choreography, lighting, costumes and sets. Its annual production of the "Nutcracker" at the Ulster Performing Arts Center in Kingston,



Gillette Creamery's newest project on Steve's Lane in Gardiner

Development Corp. to recognize outstanding businesses in the community.

The humbling part of the award, says J.B., is that there are so many deserving businesses in the area.

"There are thousands of other business owners in the county who also work hard, and have sleepless nights thinking about everything that's involved in running a company," he says. And, like a good leader, he is quick to credit his 70 employees as the heart of the company.

"Every one of those employees would run through a wall for us," he says. "You cry with these people, you laugh with them. You never want to stop that."

While many family businesses struggle with unique challenges, J.B. credits the familial business structure he shares with his brothers as essential for the company's success.

"We've all got our strengths," he says "and each one's got the other one's back." Their loyalty, instilled as youths by loving parents while growing up in Ellenville, is based on respect.

And it's the foundation for their successful business model.

Gillette Creamery, started in 1985 with four employees and two trucks, now has

essential elements for success he says.

"I don't care what field you get into, when that alarm clock goes off in the morning you need to be pumped," he says. "There are a lot of tough days in any business, so you need to love what you do."

In addition to the Gillette Creamery, other businesses to be honored at an awards dinner on Oct. 21 at Wiltwyck Country Club in Kingston include:

Business of the Year — Kingston Block & Masonry, a manufacturer of architectural block, concrete block and wall systems. Its award-winning Pozzotive Plus concrete brick line is a recycled glass alternative to traditional brick, which takes less than 15 percent of the energy to create. The company offers design options and custom manufactured solutions and its white cement blocks were used in the construction of the new Yankee Stadium.

Small Business of the Year — Keegan Ales, a popular Kingston establishment was founded in 2003 by Tom Keegan and expanded in 2007 with the opening of a full-service tap room and restaurant. The company produces 93,000 gallons of beer a year, featuring three beers and several limited-production specialty beverages. It won the esteemed Vassar Cup award and

brings in hundreds of local patrons and generates revenue for Midtown.

Building Project of the Year — Lazy Swan Golf & Country Club Village in Saugerties includes a 12,500-square-foot ballroom that seats 400 for banquets and up to 700 in a theater setting. Completion of the ballroom capped a five-year, \$10 million plan that began with renovation of the nine-hole golf course. There is also a new restaurant, lounge, bar, pro shop and adjacent service buildings.

An estimated 40 to 50 construction workers were employed for nearly five years on the building project, with dozens more working daily during the peak construction season.

Tourism Business of the Year — Hudson River Cruises, owned by Sandy Henne, is considered a seasonal "anchor" of the Kingston waterfront, attracting tourists and area residents alike to its tours along the Hudson River for 30 years. Often the recipient of the "Best of the Hudson Valley" award from Hudson Valley Magazine, the company has three full-time and 21 part-time employees.

The Heart of Ulster County Award will be presented to former Ulster County Clerk Albert Spada.