Written by KRISTYN HALBIG ZIEHM
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Downtown specialty shop set to open by May 1 in newly renovated Brewmeister Building

A bright red-and-white awning went up at the former Brewmeister building at the foot of St. Mary's Hill in Port Washington, proclaiming Broadway Popcorn as the newest business on Franklin Street in downtown.

Owner Bill Bird on Tuesday signed a lease for the first floor of the building, which is being renovated by Ross Leinweber.

The gourmet popcorn store will open by May 1, Bird said.

Broadway Popcorn is a gourmet popcorn shop, offering 19 flavors of popcorn ranging from traditional mixes such as caramel and kettle corns to chocolate cherry cheesecake and pickle pop.

The popcorn is made daily from scratch.

"We don't just make caramel corn, we make the caramel itself," Bird said. "I don't think you can find better caramel corn. We get a lot of people who come in and tell us, 'I got a bag and now I'm addicted.' We hear that time and time again."

The shop will also carry some unpopped popcorn — including Fireworks Popcorn, which also has a shop in downtown Port — as well as coconut oil and salt, he said.

But the bulk of its business is in popped corn, Bird said. Although the vast majority of his business is retail, there is also a wholesale component, he said, noting the shop supplies the American Club and Woodlake Market in Kohler and works with Acuity in Sheboygan.

This will be the second store for Bird, whose first shop is in Sheboygan Falls — another historic downtown whose revival was prompted by a Main Street effort.

"I like those of downtown settings," Bird said. "I don't want to be in a mall."

Bird said he's run out of room at his Sheboygan Falls shop, especially during the holiday season when he fills numerous corporate orders.

“We figured the best thing to do would be to open another store,” he said.

A Mequon native, Bird said he initially looked for a new location in the Cedarburg area.

“It wasn’t really a fit for us,” he said. “I like our location, and I like Port. It’s a cool little town.”

With recent improvements in the streetscape and the many building projects ongoing in downtown, Bird said, “I think we got in at the right time. There’s a lot happening here.”

The city’s tourist trade and marina will provide a good fit for his store, Bird said.

And Leinweber’s work on the building was another draw, Bird said, noting he has retained the old-fashioned feel of the structure.

“Ross has done a great job rehabbing the building,” he said.

The shop will have a retail section facing Franklin Street with production in the rear. The two areas will be open, allowing customers to watch as the staff makes the popcorn, Bird said.

“You can watch us build a flavor and pop the corn,” he said. “A lot of people are amazed by how we make everything.”

Therese Suttner will manage both stores for him, Bird said.

Leinweber is also creating two apartments above the store, which he showed off Tuesday during the Kiss of Indulgence event.

Image Information: ROSS LEINWEBER, owner of the former Brewmeister building at the corner of Franklin and Jackson streets in downtown Port, announced a retail tenant for the space this week by placing the name of the shop, Broadway Popcorn, on the new awnings.
Photo by Sam Arendt