

Adirondack Fleece Co. just warming up in Utica

New blanket business will begin marketing next month

By Traci Gregory

Journal Staff

UTICA — Adirondack Fleece wants to wrap you up — in a blanket, that is.

The company, formed six weeks ago, is the brainchild of principal owners Gary Giehl and Geoffrey Frattasio. The company also has some private investors, whom Giehl declined to name.

"It's something we've been working on for a couple of years," Giehl says of the business. The idea was hatched when the business partners were looking for suppliers of fleece blankets that could be custom embroidered and sold in their Cooperstown store, Cooperstown Gear.

The pair thought customized blankets would be a good seller, particularly for businesses that like to give out products with their logos on them. The problem wasn't selling the blankets, but finding a good and cost-effective way to get the blankets, Giehl says.

"We bought a bunch of fabric and tried to make them here" by contracting with a third-party to cut and sew the blankets,



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From left, Gary Giehl, co-principal owner of Adirondack Fleece Co., Inc.; Barry Sinnott, owner of Mayflower Trade, L.L.C., which is Adirondack Fleece's consulting agent; and Ronald Graziano, employee. The idea for Adirondack Fleece was hatched when Giehl and his business partner Geoffrey Frattasio were looking for suppliers of fleece blankets that could be custom-embroidered and sold in their Cooperstown store, Cooperstown Gear.

Giehl says. "They did a great job, but we weren't really saving money."

The business partners then began to look overseas to buy

the blankets directly from manufacturers in China. Barry Sinnott, business-development manager of Mayflower Trade, L.L.C. worked with Adirondack

Fleece to find a manufacturer. Mayflower works with American companies in their business dealings with China. Sinnott, who is fluent in Chinese, splits his time between China and Utica.

"The best way to cut costs is to go to the source," Giehl says. He and Frattasio, with Sinnott's help, met with several manufacturers in China before finding one that made a product to suit their needs.

With a blanket manufacturer in place, Giehl and Frattasio just had to find a way to get them custom embroidered. Ultimately, the pair decided the best route was to do their own embroidering.

"We could've easily sourced it out, but we wanted to control the whole process," Giehl says. "You're able to control quality and production times."

After making that decision, the pair took the next step. They formed Adirondack Fleece Co., Inc. (www.adirondackfleece.com) and purchased a used 12-head embroidery machine. The company set up shop at 901 Broad St. in 3,000 square feet of space already leased for storage space for the Cooperstown store.

About half the company's \$60,000 to \$70,000 in start-up

costs was raised from private investors. The remainder was financed through loans with First Source Federal Credit union and Bank of Utica.

Mayflower Trade has been retained as a consulting agent to manage the company's business relationships in China. That will include physically inspecting all blanket orders before they are put into containers to be shipped overseas to make sure they meet the specifications.

"It makes a world of difference if someone can actually visit the factory at a moment's notice," Giehl says.

The company currently has one employee besides Giehl and Frattasio. Ronald Graziano does the company's production work. Giehl says he hopes they can hire several employees to help with production and shipping once orders start coming in.

In the first year, Giehl says he would like to sell a minimum of 100,000 blankets.

The first shipment of unembroidered blankets is due to arrive in mid-January, and Giehl and Frattasio will work between now and then to market their product.

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