

# POLAR BEAR'S LAST SCOOP?



Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel photos

Ice cream scooper Lita Colebrissi hands 9-year-old Callie Welch a pumpkin ice cream cone at Polar Bear on Wednesday.

## Ice cream institution melts into history

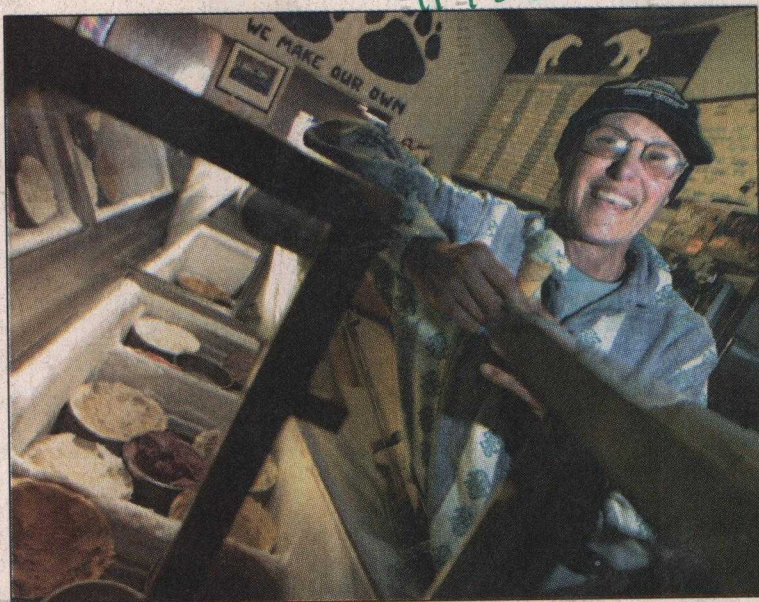
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By **DONNA JONES** and **KAREN DAVIS**  
SENTINEL STAFF WRITERS

✓ **SANTA CRUZ** — An Eastside ice cream institution is set to chill — most likely permanently — in the next few weeks.

Illness is forcing Carolyn Gray to close the Polar Bear Ice Cream shop on Soquel Avenue, though she'll keep producing the popular frozen treat at a plant in the Harvey West Business Park.

"The business has been a youthful kind of thing," the 58-year-old Santa Cruz resident said. "The best part has been working with and serving wonderful people. But I have cancer and the treatments are debilitating. ... It's been a wake-up call for me to make some lifestyle changes."

Taina Cannon, 9, barreled into the store a little after 3 p.m. Wednesday, and peered through the glass at the tubs of ice cream lined up below. A few minutes later, the smile raised by a dish of orange sherbet with sprinkles fell as she learned the store will



While Polar Bear Ice Cream owner Carolyn Gray will close the Eastside ice cream shop, her company will keep producing ice cream.

See **ICE CREAM** on **BACK PAGE**





Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel

Lita Colebrissi gives the Polar Bear Ice Cream shop a sweeping during a break on Wednesday.

## Ice Cream

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close by mid-December.

"Is it ever going to open again?" she asked. "It's the best ice cream in town."

Gray couldn't say. The shop, which also serves coffee drinks, has struggled financially due to a combination of factors, including a poor economy, increased competition for coffee sales and changes in the surrounding business district that have reduced foot traffic.

Her illness makes it difficult to find the energy to meet the daily demands of a retail business, let alone promote it, Gray said.

So she decided to let the shop go

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**'Is it ever going to open again? It's the best ice cream in town.'**

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TAINA CANNON, 9, A POLAR BEAR CUSTOMER

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and concentrate on the production end of the business, turning out favorites like Mexican chocolate, cafe au lait and ollalieberry and honey for wholesale.

"If the store was lucrative, I would have someone come in and run it," she said.

Gray said she still hopes to find someone to take over the store, but time is running out. She hasn't set a final date, and she has supplies on hand to keep scooping ice cream and serving lattes through the first week in December. Her lease expires Dec. 15.

Gray started working for Polar Bear in 1979, and purchased the Santa Cruz shop and production equipment from the second owner, Ken Smallwood, in 1987. A retired couple launched the business in about 1970, Gray said, but soon bowed out. Smallwood built the business, at one point operating shops in Capitola and Los Gatos as well as the original site at 608 Soquel.

She moved the shop to its current site at 1224 Soquel Ave. in 1990.

The Polar Bear plant, capable of producing 120 different flavors of

ice cream, frozen yogurt and sorbet, also supplies several other locations in Santa Cruz County, including Pacific Cookie Co., on Pacific Avenue, Whale City Bakery, Bar and Grill in Davenport, and Cafe Violette in Capitola. The plant makes about 300 gallons of ice cream a week during the winter, and about 1,000 in the summer.

Emmanuel Guzman, 19, is one of 11 part-time employees losing their jobs at the shop.

"Everyone here is more sorry for Carolyn than for themselves," he said. "It's been fun working here. ... But she's put a lot of work and energy into this place."

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