



# Brattleboro Development Credit Corporation Newsletter

Number Fifteen

Summer 2003

## J.S. Benson Woodworking

### *Replicating Historic Doors And Windows*

When an historic replica of windows in buildings in Boston's Beacon Hill section was needed, J.S. Benson Woodworking in Brattleboro got the call. The company, in business since 1978, has earned a strong reputation for its doors and windows, and its use of early building techniques. "The windows had to be exact," said Steve Benson of the project.

Benson and his nine employees, operate from a 17,000-square foot building located in the historic Estey Organ Complex. Here the company designs and builds fine custom mahogany doors and true divided light windows.

"We are not a mass production company," said Benson. "Rather, we are a reputable and experienced supplier of exquisite New England style doors and windows. Every door and window is custom designed to replicate any desired historic period or architectural style."

Benson works primarily with sustainably harvested pattern mahogany, a wood that does not rot, but can also use other hardwoods if the design specifications call for them. "We use traditional mortice and tenon joinery and American and European hardware in bronze, brass, stainless steel and other finishes," he explained.

"We're clever at disguising the old style with modern components," he acknowledged. "The doors and windows we make look old but function as new."



*Steve Benson builds historically accurate, high quality windows and doors.*

Benson, who said he has always been involved in woodworking, studied architecture in college. He calls his work architectural woodworking. The company was originally founded in Boston and won local recognition for craftsmanship and innovation, and was written up in the Boston Globe in 1984. In 1988 Benson was awarded a merit certificate by the Boston Society of Landscape Architects. Among his woodworking accomplishments, he engineered the wood components for the Zone VI large-format line of field cameras for photographer Fred Picker's Newfane company. He has also designed a superi-

or true divided light glazing system for the New England restoration market.

"Our exterior doors are primarily stave core. We make all types of true divided light windows: single hung, double hung, picture, bow, awning, hopper,

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#### Company News

Do you have news of interest to the Brattleboro business community? Has your company expanded, introduced a new product, won an award?

Send your information to:

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Fax it to us at 257-0294 or  
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## FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

### News From BDCC

*Kurt Isaacson,  
Executive Director*

I am happy to announce that I was officially appointed executive director July 1. I wish to thank the board of directors for their support. I look forward to continuing the good work of BDCC and continuing to assist in the economic development of the region.

In my short time at BDCC I have found an extremely stable organization with a terrific staff and board of directors. I am impressed by the board's consistent mission, which is helpful for future decision-making. This is a board committed to spending the required time to guide BDCC.

Around the region there is tremendous activity. In Bellows Falls the beautiful new Waypoint Interpretive Center is nearly complete while in Brattleboro there are several projects underway. Those projects include construction of the Transportation Center, major renovations at the high school and middle school, a new park downtown and several infrastructure improvements designed to improve traffic flow and pedestrian walkways. All of these projects will, in their own way, enhance the vitality and the desirability of the area for residents and businesses.

On the governmental scene there appears to be a sea change in economic development activity. In April Gov. Jim Douglas met with a number of BDCC Trustees to discuss his perspectives on the economy, job creation and business retention. While one of his primary legislative efforts, permit reform, has not as of this writing been passed through the legislature, a special session could be called this summer to take up this issue. The governor also vowed to play an active role in business recruitment. "I'll be glad to pick up the phone and call a business if you think that will help (with the recruitment process)," he said.

Other areas of state government are



also proactively pursuing businesses and business expansion. The Commissioner for the Department of Economic Development, Mike Quinn, joined us for a series of meetings this spring to outline his plan for business recruitment and expansion. It was clear from talking with Commissioner Quinn that additional resources are being brought to bear to improve the department's focus in these areas.

In other news we are sad to see Chroma Optical Technologies moving out of their space at the Cotton Mill at the end of August. However, their time here saw tremendous growth in their business and they will be moving into a new 21,000 square foot facility in Bellows Falls. They represent a terrific success story, and in many ways the Cotton Mill incubator space did what it was designed for: providing entrepreneurs with reasonably priced space and the opportunity to expand to the extent their skills and market demand allows.

Negotiations are underway to relocate several businesses to the area including a captive insurance company, several manufacturing firms and two companies looking for warehousing and distribution centers. It appears from this activity that the first glimmer of an economic upturn is on the horizon.

# Brattleboro Weathers Construction Season Well

According to Betsy Gentile, executive director Brattleboro Area Chamber of Commerce, this year's heavy construction season in Brattleboro is being taken in stride by locals.



*"We have lots of new businesses. I can't recall any empty storefronts."*

"All the construction happening this summer is geared to creating a much more vibrant town," she said.

The new parking garage, slated for a fall opening, will provide much needed parking for the Latchis Theater and Hotel, soon to be a community arts center. "We've always been hurting for parking," she acknowledged.

Gentile is also upbeat about renovations at Amtrak's Union Station adjoining the Brattleboro Museum and Arts center. "It will change the area with new landscaping and a covered platform for passengers to wait for trains."

Gentile said the new park at High and Main St. was, "a wonderful place to sit and enjoy the town. The sculpture and shrubs will beautify the area."

The Main Street Bridge project is scheduled for fall completion and she is looking forward to the Whetstone Brook pedestrian bridge and pathway to the new parking lot.

The closing of the Main Street Bridge should bring a new sense of community to the town as local merchants sponsor promotional activities to bring people into town, said Gentile.

Couple that with the 250th anniversary of the town's charter signing and this could be a memo-

rable summer.

Among promotions locals will see are buttons that read, "We are Building a Better Brattleboro," souvenir hardhats for children, music on lower Main Street every weekend and a photo contest of the pictures of the area construction sites. Also, there will be free parking on Saturdays sponsored by Brattleboro Savings and Loan.

Gentile said Brattleboro is economically healthy. "We have lots of new businesses. I can't recall any empty storefronts."

"People are feeling it is economically feasible to put a retail store in Brattleboro and make a go of it," she

offered.

"Things are upbeat and people are coping with construction and coming downtown."

The chamber and BDCC are now working together to help promote the area to businesses seeking to relocate here. Gentile said in late spring the two organizations sat down and put together a team approach that will help perspectives learn about the area.

"When a business is interested in relocating in Brattleboro," she said, "BDCC and the Chamber can take interested people and show them the area."

Included in the team are bankers, educators, town officials and retail owners. These team members will give a perspective on the area and business prospects. "BDCC and the banks can talk about funding and finances," she said of the process.

The two organizations also work together by linking their web sites.

"This helps with people coming to our web site looking to relocate to the area," she said. "BDCC is specifically in manufacturing and economic development and we do that plus much more."

## Benson Woodworking

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round, half round, casement, and French. We also produce a full line of European Fenestration: Tilt/Turn casements, Lift/Slide doors, and

Sliding/Folding wall systems. We use salt water resistant stainless steel and nickel plated hardware. A popular option for the European line is our maintenance free Architectural Bronze exterior cladding," said Benson.

An average window from Benson

costs \$2,000 and an exterior door \$3,000. This is about double the cost of high-end mass produced products, he said.

The company, said Benson, does little advertising and relies primarily on

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## Benson Woodworking

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word of mouth advertising. While currently working primarily in New England, Benson is looking to branch out and market more aggressively to the rest of the county. He is currently building a cadre of sales representatives.

Benson said his company has competition from several other specialty window and door manufacturers here and in Canada. Canadian companies, he said, compete unfairly primarily because they do not have to pay employee health care benefits out of pocket, thus lowering overhead costs. "There is a reason to increase our sales territory to compensate for the Canadians," he offered.

Currently Benson Woodworking has annual sales of \$1 million but hopes to reach \$1.5 to \$1.75 million when sales territory is enlarged. At that point, he said, sales would max out the production capacity of his facility. While pro-



*A skilled woodwork shapes doors and windows.*

duction rose in the 1990s, since 2001, he said, sales have been holding steady.

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