



# Brattleboro Development Credit Corporation Newsletter

Number Twenty

Fall 2004

## ForesTrade Sells Spices and Oil The Fair Trade Way

ForesTrade, located on Spring Tree Road in Brattleboro, is helping spread the word that businesses can obtain high quality spices and coffees and help Third World farmers at the same time with sustainable agriculture.

The company, begun in 1996 by Tomas Fricke and Sylvia Blanchet, imports a wide variety of spices, coffees and essential oils from Indonesia and Guatemala. By working directly with farmers in these countries it has set up processing facilities and established alliances with local processors. Through its purchasing methods it is helping farmers to earn a living wage while also making life better for them through agriculture improvements.

The company works directly with over 6,700 local indigenous farmers and has become the largest supplier of organic spices in North America and Europe.

The business started in Vermont because, said Blanchet, she and Fricke had lived here for 20 years and liked the lifestyle. Brattleboro, says Blanchet, is an excellent location for a food importing business. "There are a lot of people with international experience and this is a good base to hire from...People here care about sustainable agriculture."

ForesTrade ships its products to Europe, Japan and Canada after finish processing them, which includes grind-



*Sylvia Blanchet (right) with Lucia Lie, ForesTrade's director of its Indonesian subsidiary at the home office in Brattleboro.*

ing and sterilization, in plants in Oakland, CA. and Sparks, NV.

Companies such as Starbucks, Green Mountain Coffee Roasters, the Yogi Tea Co., Tom's of Maine and Frontier Spices and Herbs are customers. ForesTrade has 200 customers in all and did \$9 million in sales last year. For this reason and its rapid growth it was honored in September with a 5x5x5 award by Vermont Business Magazine.

The company employs 14 people in

Vermont where it does its marketing and public relations. According to Blanchet, Brattleboro is becoming a

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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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## From the Executive Director

**O**n October 20 we held our annual meeting and several changes to the by-laws were approved (see page 4). Also at that meeting we presented the Annual Founders Award (see page 3).

We are pleased that so many of our local area businesses were honored at the recent 5x5x5 Growth Award ceremony held in Burlington on September 30 by Vermont Business Magazine. Our corner of Vermont has some of the fastest growing and healthiest businesses in the state.

I want to congratulate all the winners: ForesTrade Inc., C&S Wholesale Grocers Inc., Sovernet, Vermed Inc., Chroma Technology Inc., and Sonnax Industries.

Elsewhere in the local economy I want to report that Vermont Photonics, Inc., a Brattleboro high tech company, in conjunction with Goodrich Corp., has received a \$3.15 million grant from the US Army Research to explore uses of the terahertz spectrum. This research will potentially help in bioterrorism detection.

Vermed of Rockingham received a Vermont Economic Progress Tax Incentive of over \$500,000 for research development, new equipment and expansion that will add 24 new jobs there in the next five



years.

American Traders, a canoe importer, will move from Greenfield, MA., to Brattleboro soon and a projected 12 jobs will be created.

I am often asked to

describe the local economy. I can say that it shows signs of relentless incrementalism. We should not bank on recruiting large scale employers to our region but should, instead, look to the continuance of smaller job growth at the area's existing businesses to fill the job gap.

As you can see from the unemployment rate — which as of June (the last figure available), we had a 3.2 percent unemployment rate, well below the national and state averages — we have a healthy local economy.

I recently was asked to describe the summer and early fall tourist season. Based on visitors to the Andy Warhol exhibit at the Brattleboro Museum and Arts Center, I believe we are doing fairly well in this area. That exhibit, which runs until February, brought in 2,000 visitors in the first two weeks it was open. Viewers came from 17 states and eight foreign countries.

# Dr. Robert L. Johnson Jr. Presented with Founders Award

**D**r. Robert L. Johnson Jr., the founder of Omega Optical, was presented with the BDCC Founders Award at the October 21 annual meeting.

The winner of this award is known for creating value-added jobs and promoting an environment that enhances the economic vitality of the region.

Johnson grew up in Brattleboro and graduated from Brattleboro High School in 1963. After working for five years in Boston for an optical filter manufacturer, he returned to southern Vermont in 1968 to start his own company. He formed Omega Optical, Inc., January 1, 1969.

Omega began making filters for

*What started as a “one-man” operation in a garage is now a \$10 million company with over 125 employees and 33 international distributors.*

researchers almost from the first day. The company outgrew its original location in a garage and moved onto Brattleboro’s Main Street in 1975. While the company has enjoyed its downtown presence, it is planning to consolidate the entire operation in a new facility — the Delta Business Campus — located on the Brattleboro-Guilford border.

During the 1980s Omega spun-off several businesses and institutions, changing the commercial and cultural landscape of the Brattleboro area. Friends of the Sun was organized as a retail and service provider for alternative energy products that Omega planned to manufacture. Solar Hill was established as an alternative energy educational institution and evolved into a center for alternative health care practitioners and a private primary school, the Neighborhood Schoolhouse.

The 1980s also saw the beginnings of Omega’s work in the field of astronomy. One of the first projects was the manufacture of a set of filters for the analysis of Halley’s comet. The 1990s saw the challenge of repairing the Hubble Space Telescope’s Widefield Planetary Camera and projects for NASA’s Martian Lander and the next generation space telescope.

What started as a “one-man” operation in a garage is now a \$10 million company with over 125 employees and 33 international distributors.

## Local Companies Honored By 5x5x5 Awards

**S**ix local companies were honored in September by *Vermont Business Magazine* with 5x5x5 growth awards. The event, held at the Wyndham Hotel in Burlington, honors Vermont’s fastest growing businesses in five industry sectors over the last five years.

Winning in the Food Sector were ForesTrade Inc. and C&S Wholesale Grocers Inc., both of Brattleboro. In the Technology Sector, Sovernet and Vermed Inc. of Bellows Falls and Chroma Technology Inc. of

Rockingham were chosen. In the Manufacturing Sector, Sonnex Industries of Bellows Falls was honored.

Growth has been spectacular for these companies in the past five years. ForesTrade has grown 328.6 percent, C&S Wholesale Grocers 121.6 percent, Sovernet 132.6 percent, Vermed 93.2 percent, Chroma 88.5 percent and Sonnax 96 percent.

## ForesTrade

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small hub for fair trade and organic food companies. “We feel supported by the Vermont community and Vermont Businesses for Social Responsibility,” she said.

While business is growing exponentially, Blanchet said the biggest problem her company currently faces is not with product but with immigration. “The challenge for us is bringing our foreign staff into the US for trade shows. We have staff in Indonesia who are Muslims. It’s hard to bring them here.”

Blanchet said her business is growing rapidly because of its products. “It does make a difference when people buy organic,” she noted.

## BDCC By-laws Changed

At the October 20 annual meeting, revisions to the governance structure were presented and accepted. All Trustees were asked to remain as Members, but resign their position as Trustees. Then, a new smaller slate of Trustees was elected. The present Executive Committee was nominated as Trustees.

This was done to eliminate the cumbersome process of requiring the current Trustees to approve the year-long actions of the Executive Committee.

Also, Governor James Douglas spoke to the assembled 40 members of BDCC at the meeting held at the Marlboro Graduate Center in Brattleboro. He spoke about his successes in job creation, permit reform, workers compensation reform and emphasized that there remains more work to be done.

BDCC Board of Trustees Officers elected are: Bill Palumbo President, Deborah Boyle Vice President, John V.P. Meyer Treasurer, Richard Carroll Clerk.

## Notice

We apologize for inadvertently leaving T. Breeze Verdant’s name off the list of exhibitors at our 50th celebration event.

## Cotton Mill Open Studio

Cotton Mill artisans will hold a holiday sale and open studio celebration at the Cotton Mill. The two-day event is Friday, December 10 from noon to 8 PM and Saturday, December 11 from 10 to 5.

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