



Cotton Mill Hill Tenant Earns First-Place Prize

In this year's third annual Vermont Fine Furniture and Wood Products Design Competition, woodworking artist and Cotton Mill Hill tenant T. Breeze VerDant won first place for his box entitled "Midnight Iris," in the Custom Woodenware category.

Drawing nearly 100 entries from woodworkers and students throughout the state this year, the competition is particularly appealing to VerDant because it is peer voted. This is the third time in as many years that VerDant has won an award — he took second place in 2004 for another iris box he created, and he won third prize in last year's competition with a wall display depicting a "View From The Trees."

Speaking of trees, VerDant loves them and has been somehow involved with wood for as long as he can remember, whether by climbing trees, building his own house (twice!), doing carpentry work, or creating art.

The largely self-taught artist said it was a "fluke" that he turned to marquetry. He doesn't remember there being too many art classes in school when he was growing up in upstate New York. He took a mechanical drawing class in high school, but that was as close as he got to a visual creative form.



T. Breeze VerDant

However, at the age of 37, when he was working as a trim carpenter and licensed massage therapist while playing in a band down South, the wife of another band member told him about the Penland School of Crafts in the Blue Ridge Mountains of North Carolina. VerDant saw a marquetry course offered in the catalog, signed up for it, and received a scholarship to attend. "I had to work in the kitchen while I was there, but it was okay, we had fun."

Since then, "marquetry has served as a vehicle for me to focus," according to VerDant, who says he tends toward having attention-deficit disorder. "I have ideas in my head that go all over the place, and marquetry gives me something concrete to focus on."

Focus is probably an understatement, as his intricate and elaborate designs would attest. He uses a combina-

tion of thin wood veneers, Paua abalone, and fine metals to create landscapes and other designs on various shaped boxes, earrings, pins, money clips, and other items. "In the past 20 years, my designs have been constantly changing," says VerDant. "I like to play with my ideas."

He works mostly with scrap wood that he buys from the finest veneer supply companies. "There's no sawdust, no waste," says VerDant, which is important to him. He often asks for the most rosy-colored wood they have to satisfy his particular penchant for red. He also likes to use abalone to add the color blue to his marquetry work, since he says blue is a color that doesn't appear naturally in wood. The closest it gets to blue, according to VerDant, is when rain water penetrates the wood through holes bored by bugs. The cloudlike effect it produces inspires VerDant when he's creating his designs.

Another inspiration for his work is the beauty of the

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VerDant's "Midnight Iris" won first place in the state competition.

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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



Since coming on board as the new executive director of the Brattleboro Development Credit Corporation (BDCC) this past spring, I have been engaged in a lot of listening and observing. Of the many conversations I have had with various business owners, BDCC tenants, community leaders, board members, and others, I have definitely noticed a common thread. When we discuss the economic vitality of the greater Brattleboro area, we can't help but talk about the global factors involved.

So many large and small companies in this "tiny" part of the world interact with or are impacted by global markets on a regular basis, whether it's drawing raw materials from around the world, shipping product to equally varied destinations, or simply being impacted by global competition.

The recent news of the lost jobs at Fulflex is just one more example of how the global economy touches us personally and professionally here in the Brattleboro community. During its 24-year tenure among us, Fulflex has employed up to 140 Vermonters, whom they credit as being the best workforce in the five

locations of their international company from Luxembourg to Singapore.

As we move forward, as a town and a state, it will be important and necessary for us to constantly consider the greater, broader, more powerful forces that drive business decisions today. The rapidly changing dynamics of the global economy are not going away; the quest for efficiency is relentless, whether we like it or not.

The Vermont economy now competes with people and manufacturers around the world. We here in the Brattleboro area and Vermont as a whole can do well in this competition because we have skilled workers, smart leaders, talented managers, and, most importantly, an excellent ability to innovate in products and processes. It is not simply the quality of our people, life, and environment, but the innovative ways we can create value that will be our hallmark for success.

At BDCC, we have historically played a strong, successful role in supporting the business environment throughout southeastern Vermont. We will continue to dedicate ourselves in policy and practice to support local businesses, recognize and celebrate success, support innovation and risk, and help to provide a strong business climate.

Cotton Mill Hill Tenant *Continued from front page.*

landscape in Vermont and his native New York. He has lived in southern Vermont for the past 11 years, and still has a home he built in the Adirondacks. He has maintained a studio at BDCC's Cotton Mill Hill for about as long as he's lived in Vermont. "There are a bunch of great folks down here," says VerDant, who says he likes having his own space without feeling isolated. "I like my neighbors and having people nearby."

In addition to being a full-time artist, VerDant has taught weeklong marquetry courses for the past eight years at the John C. Campbell Folk School in North Carolina. "I love to teach," says VerDant. "I love to facilitate people's growth, to help empower them."

VerDant's work is empowering in and of itself, and can be found online at his website (www.tbreezeverdant.com/) and at Vermont Artisan Designs in Brattleboro, the Artisan's Hand in Montpelier, the Northeast Kingdom Art Guild in St. Johnsbury, Frog Hollow in Burlington and Middlebury, as well as at the occasional fine craft fair. He can be reached at 802-258-9820 or tbreeze@sover.net.



VerDant shows a sample of the wood veneer he uses in his work.

Photo credit: Donna McElligott

BDCC Welcomes New Tenants to the Book Press Building

New tenants recently moved into BDCC's Book Press Business Park on Route 5, bringing the roster of businesses represented in the building to 25. The newest tenants include:

Against the Grain,

a food manufacturing business that was one of seven finalists in BDCC's first annual Business Plan Competition this past year. The owners, Nancy and Tom Cain of Marlboro, bake and freeze gluten-free bread for commercial and wholesale distribution.



Photo credit: Kelly Fletcher

Tom and Nancy Cain are the owners of Against the Grain.

Amasoulei Massage and Bodyworks, a massage therapy business owned by Chrisanna Winter.

Turbo Signs and Screen Printing, a company that produces banners, signs, and t-shirts. Owners Allen and Lois Warren originally launched the business in Wilmington in 1999 before relocating to the Brattleboro area.

Vermont Islands, a company that designs and manufactures high-end, customized food and beverage service islands for residential and commercial clients. The business is owned and operated by Tom and Nancy Meyer of Putney, who founded the company in 1999. (See profile in this newsletter.)

The Book Press building, comprising 300,000 square feet, was formerly home to Quebecor, an international book publishing company that closed the plant in 1999. Recognizing the many benefits of the site — commercially zoned, high ceilings, plenty of parking, and close proximity to Interstate 91 — BDCC purchased the facility in 2000 to create the industrial park that it is today. An additional 121,000 square feet of space, suitable for both storefront and warehousing needs, is currently available. BDCC offers flexible and competitive leasing arrangements in response to the fluctuating demand.

Profile: Vermont Islands

What originated as a sideline business in 1999 to fill the void in a cabinetmaker's winter work schedule has become a national — even international — company filling a unique niche. Vermont Islands, owned and operated by Tom and Nancy Meyer of Putney, is a manufacturer of premier outdoor kitchen and bar carts that can be found in places as far away as your favorite Sandals beach resort or as close as your neighbor's backyard.

"We had targeted the residential market first but, after a couple of years, our commercial market took off and now accounts for 90 percent of our business," says Tom Meyer, who recently oversaw his company's relocation to BDCC's Book Press Business Park.

"On the commercial side, we solved a problem they already had," says Tom. Golf courses and beach resorts were doing more and more entertaining outdoors, and needed versatile, durable, finely crafted "islands" to prepare and serve food and beverages.

Vermont Island carts are handcrafted from exotic hardwoods from South America and topped with polished granite from Vermont and Canada. They feature stainless steel appliances, and are designed as mobile, modular units that can be mixed and matched to meet the particular needs of each client.

Tom, who has been a builder since he was a teenager, said they launched the company in the Meyers' barn woodshop, then moved the business to some old sheds across the street from Basketville. When they started to outgrow that space, it took quite a bit of looking to find something else suitable.

"We had trouble finding space in Vermont," says Tom, who ended up with a second site in Turners Falls, Massachusetts, before the BDCC stepped in. "The BDCC put together a package for us here at the Book Press that has worked out well.



Photo credit: Donna McElligott

Tom Meyer of Vermont Island is seen here with one of their handcrafted outdoor beverage carts.

They have been extremely easy to work with. Everything went smoothly and everyone's happier being in one place. Consolidating our business has had tremendously positive effects — we've already passed last year's sales."

Anticipating future growth, Vermont Islands is now in the process of working with the State of Vermont to develop training programs for new employees. They currently have 17 employees, including Tom and Nancy's daughter.

When asked what advice he would offer anyone starting a new business, Tom said, "It's hard work. You need perseverance. We came up with an idea that was a bit unique, which allowed us to build a strong clientele."

A clientele that now includes many repeat customers with multiple sites. Vermont Islands' impressive client list includes: The Breakers in Palm Beach, Philadelphia's Citizens Park Stadium, Disney's Swan and Dolphin Resort, The Greenbriar in West Virginia, The Nantucket Yacht Club, the Ritz-Carlton in Half Moon Bay, the West Hampton Country Club in New York, and Sandals beach resorts in Bermuda, Jamaica, and the Bahamas.

For more information about Vermont Islands, visit their website at www.vermontislands.com or contact them at 802-246-2277 or vtisland@sover.net.

Keep Us in Mind! The Annual BDCC Meeting is Slated for Late October

It's almost time for the annual meeting of the Members of the Brattleboro Development Credit Corporation!

Planning is underway for the fall event. Although a date was not finalized as of press time for this newsletter, we hope you will keep late October in mind so that you'll be able to join us.

The location will be the same: the Marlboro College Technology Center, 28 Vernon Street, in Brattleboro.

This year's meeting will feature the customary official agenda items, such as election of officers, plus several new business items and an interesting speaker. In addition, Executive Director Jeffrey Lewis will provide a brief report summarizing a half-day Trustee retreat that will be taking place a few weeks prior to the annual meeting.

More information will be announced soon. If you have any questions, please contact Office Manager Sandy Otero at 802-257-7731 or bdccso@sover.net.

BDCC Announces 2nd Annual Business Plan Competition



Photo credit: Kelly Fletcher

Serenity Smith Forchion of Nimble Arts is seen here being congratulated for winning the \$20,000 first-place prize in last year's Business Plan Competition.

After the success of last year's first-ever Business Plan Competition, the Brattleboro Development Credit Corporation is preparing to launch the second annual competition . . . with a new twist! Two prize categories will be available this year – one for already established businesses and one for new business ideas.

Last year's winner, Nimble Arts Trapeze and Circus School, was among 44 contestants who were narrowed down to seven finalists. Six of the finalists each received a \$1,000 prize, while Nimble Arts received a first-place \$20,000 award. Based at Cotton Mill Hill, Nimble Arts was founded three years ago by twin sisters Serenity Smith Forchion and Elsie Smith. They teach acrobatics, trapeze, and juggling to adults and children as young as 18 months.

"The Business Plan Competition is multifaceted in its goals," says Jeffrey Lewis, BDCC executive director. "It helps to raise awareness in the community about small businesses and entrepreneurship, and it results in business plans,

public attention, and cash prizes for the finalists. This year, having two prize categories, we hope to increase our impact on jumpstarting new business growth in the region." Further details about the competition will be announced soon.

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