

Brattleboro Development Credit Corporation Newsletter

Number Nine

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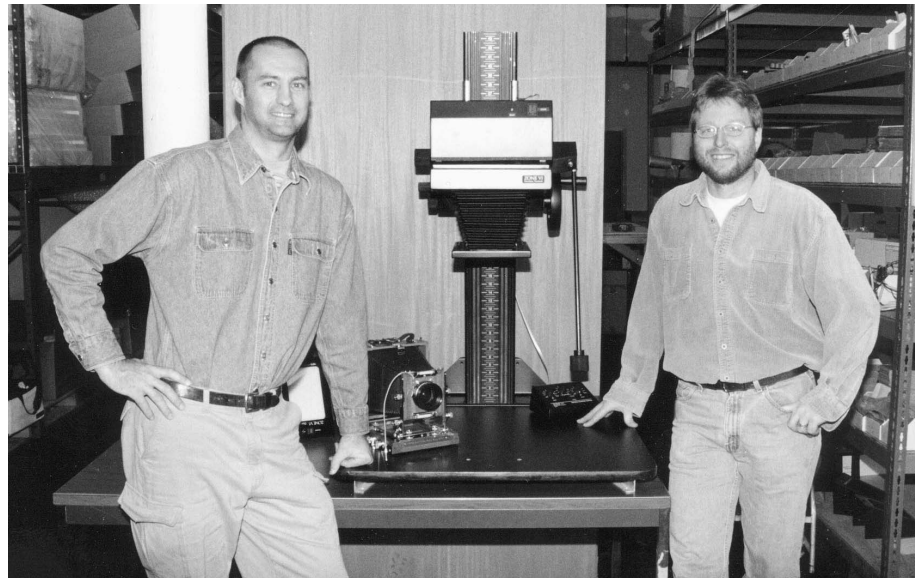
BBZ INC. Builds Cameras

Some of the finest photographic equipment available is built in Brattleboro at the Cotton Mill. The Calumet line of Zone VI cameras and enlargers is assembled by BBZ INC. a company that has occupied space here for just a year.

For serious photographic professionals the computer store digital camera and even the high priced Canon, Minolta or Nikon 35 mm film cameras will not do. Photographers like George DeWolfe or the late Ansel Adams, require large format cameras with 5x7 or 8x10 inch negatives. These behemoths can weigh several pounds, require a tripod to hold them, and use sheet film not film rolls. They are expensive, often costing more than \$2000 for the body alone. There are few companies that make them.

In the 1980s Newfane-based photographer Fred Picker began his Zone VI company. He was a large format photographer and took his designs to the production level. He eventually produced these cameras and enlargers as well as special enlarger timers and the lighting element that went into the enlarger. Eventually, in the mid 1990s, he sold his product line to Chicago-based Calumet Photo Co.

When Picker sold his product line, Calumet needed a company to manufacture the products it features in its catalog and web site. They looked to two Hungarian born engineers who had worked with Picker. Zsolt Pomazi and Bela Takacs decided to start their own



Bela Takacs (left) and Bryan Wittler owners of BBZ INC. show off the Zone VI Camera and enlarger they build at their Cotton Mill assembly plant.

company to make the products. They enlisted Bryan Wittler a Brattleboro resident who had worked in several local businesses. Thus the BBZ name.

BBZ operates in 7,000 square feet of Cotton Mill space on the second floor. Wittler and Takacs run the day-to-day operation while Pomazi does the book-keeping.

BBZ is shelf upon shelf of electronic gear, metal parts and wood pieces, all components of the product line.

The cameras they build are made partially of mahogany. These cameras have traditionally been wood bodied. The hardware, until recently gold plated

brass, is now anodized black

continued on page 3

INSIDE THIS EDITION...

- **News From BDCC.**
Page 2
- **Vermont Government
Marketing Assistance Center**

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Company News

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

Send your information to:

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News From BDCC

By *Bill McGrath*

The winter so far has been relatively quiet economically speaking. We still await a final decision by C & S Grocers (which tops

the Vermont Business Magazine's Top 100 Companies) on its choice of location for its new corporate headquarters. Contenders remain Keene and Brattleboro.

While the company decides where to locate, it continues to grow. It recently rented 84,000 square feet of space at the Book Press building where it is now warehousing overstock merchandise.

That building is filling up rapidly with just 125,000 square feet left unoccupied. We can rent space starting at 5,000 square feet.

Commercial – industrial space in the county is at a premium. Only about 200,000 square feet are available. At the Cotton Mill we are essentially full with just 2,000 square feet left. 143,000 square feet has been filled. It is going to be slim pickings for companies looking to expand or move in Windham Co.

As the economy continues to slow it is taking its toll on our tourism industry. For the Christmas Holiday I must report that skier days were lower than anticipated at Mt. Snow, Stratton and Magic Mtn. Of course the lack of snow contributed to this disappointing holiday. These mountains are also affected by the continued drought which limits the amount of snow they are able to make, a problem that is statewide among ski areas.

However, local restaurant and lodging businesses say their did about the same



in sales as in 2000.

We have a new business at the Cotton Mill. Surefire Distributors, a company distributing musical recordings has relocated from Natick, MA. The company occupies 3500 square feet of space and has six employees.

The economic climate in January is much more cautious than in August. The September 11 event certainly has been a factor. Vermont is part of the national/global economy and our local businesses, those supplying other businesses, are being affected and orders have been lost or cancelled. People are not encouraged about the first half of 2002.

We at BDCC are the contact point for the SBA's September 11 Economic Injury Disaster Loan Program. If you think you might qualify do contact us.

I must also report that there is very little planned construction in the area. With the exception of Cersosimo Industries, which owns a small development company building on two small single family developments in Brattleboro, there is little to report. Construction however has not come to a halt and the industry is occupied with renovations and retrofits.

Vermont Government Marketing Assistance Center

Vermonters can access the wealth of federal, state and municipal contracts that go to bid each year through the Economic Development Department's Government Marketing Assistance Center.

Center director Greg Lawson says Vermont businesses have secured "several billion dollars in contracts," since the program was first introduced a decade ago.

The center provides Vermont companies with help with marketing and technical assistance. Also, it helps find the appropriate federal agencies to sell products to. The center also aids in forms preparation.

"The service provided by the Economic Development Dept. is free to Vermont business," said Lawson.

"The federal government buys a wide range of products and services, so many Vermont businesses could qualify and potentially benefit," he explained.

Lawson currently is working with 215 Vermont companies to secure contracts. The value of the contracts varies from \$4500 to \$800,000, he said.

Since 1997 EDD has expanded the GMAC to include the Vermont Business Registry, an online registry system. With this system companies can register their business profile online. "The registry allows other companies to find Vermont businesses to partner with," said Lawson.

Currently nearly all state contracts, those with an estimated value of

\$10,000 or more, are listed on the registry. "If a company signs up with the registry they can get electronic notification of state and federal contracts that apply to them," said Lawson.

A business wanting to become part of the registry should contact Lawson at 802-828-5770. His staff will then determine the search criteria which matches the product or service. They will help decide what federal/state agencies will potentially consider your company for contract bids. They will then plan a site visit to help you will forms and techni-

"The registry allows other companies to find Vermont businesses to partner with."

— Greg Lawson,
Director of the Economic
Development Department's
Government Marketing Assistance
Center

cal information.

"Then we set up the bid search for the company, so they receive electronic notification.

Contracting opportunities can arrive at your business email address on a daily basis," he said.

For more information on the registry visit www.thinkvermont.com and click on "Business to Business".

BBZ, Inc.

continued from page 1

aluminum; as a result the cameras are significantly lighter (in the five pound range).

BBZ builds 130 cameras a year for Calumet. It also builds about 100 enlargers. These machines are capable of taking the 5x7 or 8x10 negative the cameras produce and projecting the image onto photographic paper. Photographs made from

Hungarian-born Bela Takacs hefts a Zone VI large format camera produced for Calumet Cameras of Chicago.



BBZ, Inc.

continued from page 3

enlargers like these are of the highest definition and quality.

“We don’t make huge numbers of product but our sales are between \$700,000 and \$1 million a year,” said Wittler.

While there has been an explosion in the use of digital cameras, and the amateur 35mm film photographic market is strong, Wittler does not see his product line falling off. “Our market share seems to be growing,” he said.

According to him, Calumet has accounts with many schools and supplies enlargers and cameras to those education programs. And, large-format hobbyists and professionals continue their interest in his products.

The partners are, however, interested in diversifying their customer base. While Wittler admits his company was “buried under work.” And could not keep up with orders, he realizes the vagaries of business. Another contractor would benefit BBZ. “Its scary having



Bryan Wittler (left) and Bela Takacs enjoy the well-lit 7,000 square feet of space BBZ, Inc. rents in the Cotton Mill in Brattleboro.

just one customer,” he said.

BBZ is pleased with its space at the Cotton Mill. The partners first thought about building but said after talking with Bill McGrath decided on their

present location. “We like having a lot of natural light and have plenty of room to expand,” said Wittler.

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