

# Artisan Services Center Provides Backbone to Art

By ANN ALI

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CHARLESTON — Artisans' works fill the shelves at Tamarack, and it takes a lot of work to get it there, but artists often have businesses and concerns beyond the Mountain State's showcase of arts, crafts and cuisine.

The Tamarack Foundation and its Artisan Resource Center is the Small Business Association's 2009 home-based business winner for its efforts to support and connect artisans throughout the state.

Ron DeWitt, program director for Tamarack Foundation and also Artisan Services director for Tamarack, said his two jobs go hand-in-hand.



DeWitt

"My job has been to support our artists," he said. "We work so well together, but when the foundation was created, this was just a lot of foresight of the board.

"Their foresight, the real realization of the mission of Tamarack, became possible when the foundation was created, and it allowed us to go outside and seek additional funds in support of our artists ... to help them professionally; not only in business, but also in their product development and their marketing material."

Sally Barton, a native of Greensboro, N.C., was named the foundation's executive director six years ago during its inception.

"We're building an environment of success for small business owners who

happen to be artists," Barton said.

Barton said she came to the foundation after working in corporate development for Charleston Area Medical Center and later, the CAMC Foundation. When an acquaintance presented her with the Tamarack Foundation position, she was eager to try her

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hand at starting something new. "It was a great opportunity at a young age to start something from scratch," she said. "It wasn't just to raise money for the foundation, it was using skills to work directly with the board, to shape programming, to raise money and do something that had not been done before in West Virginia."

DeWitt said he's pleased with recent improvements to the jury process. He said in 2007 about 300 people went through four days of the jury process to enter works at Tamarack, but only 20 percent of those artists were accepted.

DeWitt said with the use of pre-screening and product development, 45 percent of the artists make it through the pre-screening process and into the jury session. Among those artisans, 84 percent now make it into Tamarack.

"If their work wasn't up to the standards of Tamarack, we reviewed some of the requirements," he said. "We wanted to provide them with other opportunities to grow their businesses ... to make them understand what it means to set up their business properly, and as a business, to go through all their marketing materials.

"Any West Virginia artist is able to use the center."

Seven other arts organizations were invited to Tamarack's jury session this year, so instead of taking a day to introduce their works only to Tamarack, artisans may have gone home with connections or sales at Tamarack and many other arts festivals.

Barton said the foundation created the center as a one-stop shop for any



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artist's needs as a creative individual.

The Foundation receives funding from the Claude Worthington Benedum foundation, the Appalachian Regional Commission and the Carter Family Foundation. It's also been able to partner with Mountain State University for some office space and interns. The Women's Center in Beckley also provides information during the jury process.

"We've done a lot with very little," Barton said.

"I feel like I'm a conduit, because effective fundraising is not about asking for money; it's helping those who want to help understand what their money can do and to help them be a part of it," she added.

Barton said the foundation pays 50 percent of an apprentice's wages for any artisan who wants to hire an apprentice.

She shared an example of a blacksmith who took a high school student as an apprentice in 2007 and 2008. The student told the foundation she was accepted to Winthrop University to study metals and jewelry, which wouldn't have happened without her apprenticeship.

The foundation took its show on the road in 2008 to visit artisans and towns throughout West Virginia. The trip was another way for the foundation to spread its services, gauge artisan needs and connect the artisans to one another.

Another service of the foundation is an artisan emergency fund. All artists contribute money to the fund, which can be used if something tragic happens to an artist that is beyond his or her control and not attributable to bad business practices.

"It is very generously supported by the artists, because they know it could be them or their neighbors," Barton said. "And the thing is, they are so humble, and they always think somebody else needs it more than they do."

DeWitt said the center has been working with West Virginia Public Broadcasting at the suggestion of one artist who supports PBS and asked if he could be featured during PBS fundraising. DeWitt said PBS received an increase in donations along with positive response for featuring the regional artist.

"We feel we're setting up a great partnership that benefits them (PBS) as well as our artists," he said. "We're only going to get better at this.

"When we go into these communities, we try to go to local arts groups, arts organizations and ask them what can we do to partner with you? What are your weaknesses and strengths?"

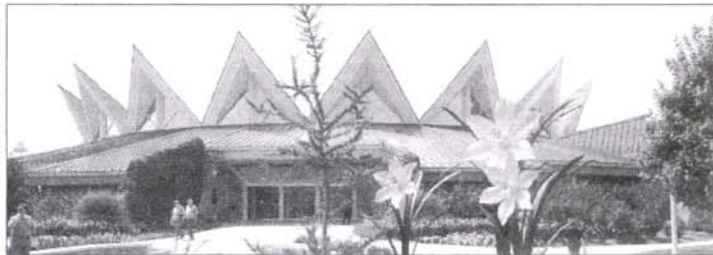
He said he gets joy out of providing opportunities for arts organizations and connecting the dots.

Barton said thinking of artists as bad businesspeople is a stereotype the foundation addresses on a one-on-one basis.

"For those who have no interest in learning Quickbooks, we find someone to provide that service at cost for that business," she said. "They're already working hard; we help them work smarter.

"The foundation's purpose is to create a marketplace for the work of West Virginia's artists both in West Virginia and beyond."

Tamarack Foundation hosts an annual gala, which is scheduled for Sept. 19 at Tamarack.



The State Journal File Photo

Tamarack in Beckley showcases the Mountain State's arts, crafts and cuisine.

**Sharp thinking can brighten the world.**

Congratulations to Sally Barton, Executive Director, The Tamarack Foundation and to the Foundation's Artisan Resource Center lead by Ron DeWitt for receiving the 2009 Home-Based Business Champion Award from the SBA.

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