

ACCESS

MANITOBA

July - September 2004

Showcasing Manitoba's Best

by Lee Gregg

The first **Uniquely Manitoba Gift Show** proved to be an excellent opportunity for Manitoba arts, crafts and specialty food producers to showcase their merchandise. The two-day tradeshow, held in Winnipeg, March 21st and 22nd, profiled the province's talented pool of artists for the almost 500 retailers, wholesalers, gallery owners and other buyers who attended this event.

They did not leave disappointed. Sparked by great imaginations, buyers found unique creations captured by the skill and mastery of Manitoba's best. There was something for everyone, whether they were collectors, decorators or gift buyers.

Supported by Western Economic Diversification Canada, the Uniquely Manitoba Gift Show was a wonderful marketing opportunity that artisans and craftspeople would not be able



1. Rolly's – Roland Becker produces one-of-a-kind fibreglass and resin composite creations. 2. Arnold Donkey – communicating his love for nature and his Aboriginal heritage through carving. 3. Flanders Cookie Company Inc. – Belgian chocolate sugar waffle cookies unique in taste, size, shape and pattern. 4. Sheila Spence – One-of-a-kind photo-based etchings.

to afford on an individual basis. The show not only provided a venue to attract buyers, but also offered the artists an opportunity to have their work evaluated by a team of merchandising specialists. The judges provided written feedback in the areas of design, workmanship, saleability and promotional materials to help participants with their on-going business development.

Additional benefits to participants were the workshops and seminars on order taking, production scheduling, marketing, booth display and after-show follow-up.

Explore the creativity and great craftsmanship that Manitoba artisans have to offer by visiting the Uniquely Manitoba Web site at: www.uniquelymanitoba.ca and browsing through the on-line catalogue. ♣

Making the Most of Manitoba's Forest Industry

by Lee Gregg

Great news for Manitoba's forestry industry! The new **Canada-Manitoba Economic Partnership Agreement** announced \$1.04 million in funding for Manitoba's primary and specialty wood product manufacturers who will now have access to **Forintek Canada's Value-Added and Wood Technology Program**.

Forintek is Canada's national wood products research institute. A partnership of over 185 private sector and government members, it supports Canada's forest products industry by helping members to improve product quality, add value in the manufacturing chain, reduce production costs, expand market share and monitor market trends.

Western Economic Diversification Canada and the Province of Manitoba each contributed \$518,600 to establish Manitoba as Forintek's eighth partner province. Forintek also invested \$225,000 in the partnership to establish a Manitoba office with two trained and experienced advisors — one focused on northern/Aboriginal development and another on the secondary industry, with specific attention to the wood manufacturing cluster in and around Winnipeg. Membership also includes a seat on the Technical Advisory Committee that provides



Image courtesy of Forintek Canada Corp.

direction on research, as well as access to Forintek's extensive library of reports and technical documents.

The forestry and wood products sector is a vital part of the Canadian economy, and is particularly important in the western provinces. The Government of Canada is committed to bridging the commercialization gap by working with industry and government partners and investing in research and development opportunities. The expertise of Forintek will help strengthen and diversify the wood products sector and build capacity for future growth.

With over 26 million hectares of forestlands, Manitoba's forestry industry is the fifth largest manufacturing sector in the province. Exports of Manitoba forestry products are valued at \$615 million a year, providing over 7,000 direct jobs. The Manitoba-Forintek partnership benefits include expanded job opportunities, job diversification, improved competitiveness and increased industry profitability.

For additional information on Forintek programs and services, visit their Web site at: www.forintek.ca. 🍁

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Doing it Right...the First Time

by Lee Gregg

George Ritchot, president of Winnipeg's **Ritchot Levelling & Landscaping**, knows firsthand how important it is to create the right impression.

A strong work ethic and attention to detail did not go unnoticed by Randall Homes, a residential construction firm. Impressed with his high standards and just-in-time customer service, Ritchot was encouraged to start his own landscaping services business, with the homebuilder promising to contract with him.

A general labourer for residential construction, Ritchot had always wanted to run his own business. With the Randall contract on the table he knew it was time to strike out on his own. Looking for business start-up information, Ritchot was referred to Jeanne Stoyka, Business Information Officer at the **Canada/Manitoba Business Service Centre (C/MBSC)**. "Jeanne provided me with information and guides that gave me direction in starting my business," said Ritchot. "She also made me aware of the Centre's resources, funding programs and the Interactive Business Planner."

As with many young entrepreneurs, integrity is fundamental to how Ritchot conducts his business. He feels personally accountable and responsible for the work that he does and strives for a high level of customer satisfaction and overall quality. "Randall builds 200 to 300 homes a season," said Ritchot. "They were impressed with my work and the fact that I was on site when I said I would be, the work was completed on schedule and it was done right the first time."



George Ritchot, president of Ritchot Levelling & Landscaping.

After three years in business, Ritchot is still amazed that a "young guy can build a successful business in such a short amount of time." As he continues to build his business, Ritchot has never lost sight of the importance of relationship building with his customers. This personal touch has paid off with a 33 per cent growth in revenue during the last fiscal year.

Ritchot Levelling & Landscaping provides services in the areas of grading, leveling and landscaping in the spring, summer and fall, and snow removal services during the winter. For information, call (204) 791-2246.

The C/MBSC is a member of the Western Canada Business Service Network and is financially supported by Western Economic Diversification Canada. For information visit www.cbcs.org/manitoba. ♦

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Designing Success for Fashion Entrepreneurs

by Lee Gregg

It's not enough that fashion entrepreneurs should be artistic and creative, but on top of their fashion skills they must have business skills as well. In this highly competitive sector, Manitoba entrepreneurs are very lucky to have Laurie Butler, director of education and liaison at the **Manitoba Fashion Institute (MFI)**, on their side.

Realizing that there were no support systems in place for new and emerging fashion designers, Butler assembled an advisory committee and proposed that the MFI develop an incubator program to provide training and access to technology. "By providing these support services," said Butler, "the MFI can foster Manitoba talent and keep fashion designers in Manitoba."

Started in 2002 as an initiative of the MFI Training Centre, the incubator is the only industry-based apparel training centre in Canada. Working with the provincial government, the MFI has developed a training program that covers such diverse subjects as: efficiency in factory production, management, marketing and skills development.

Determined to have a state-of-the-art facility, Butler turned to Western Economic Diversification Canada (WD) for assistance in purchasing computer-aided design (CAD) systems. WD's \$113,000 investment allowed Butler to negotiate a deal with both Gerber and Lectra, the two major technology players in the sewn products trade. The result, Manitoba companies now have access to both world-class systems at one site.

The incubator is in the process of selecting their first resident through a business plan competition. The winning company

will be provided office space within the MFI for a nominal fee and will be nurtured by the specialists who teach and work there. Company staff will be taught to use both CAD systems, and have access to a digital fabric printer – the only one in Canada.

The MFI incubator will also support existing companies by allowing them to book time to use the technology or work with one of the instructors. Butler is currently looking to extend their services and technology to rural Manitoba via the Internet.

For information on the programs and services offered by the Manitoba Fashion Institute, call (204) 988-1524 or visit their Web site at: www.apparel-manitoba.org. 🍁



Laurie Butler demonstrates on one of the Incubators' CAD systems. The technology allows users to digitize an existing pattern, construct a new pattern, create designs and perform grading (sizing).