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Card company uses area artists

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ENLARGE PHOTO



Artwork by Aaron Constant

Sentimental or sassy, warm or wacky, greeting cards are a huge business in the U.S. While most of us only think of greeting cards on holidays, Milford's New Hampshire Greeting Cards sells cards that are portable fine art.

Scot and Mary Langdon bought Card Connection, which was selling greeting cards made by Northern Cards of Canada on a consignment basis to small- and medium-sized stores in New Hampshire.

"It actually all began quite by accident," Mary recalled. "I was chatting with a neighbor who knew of a small business for sale."

But what started as a way to spend more time on family and career has evolved into a growing business.

Since the purchase in January, the Langdons have added nine additional client stores and wholesale accounts, and reduced the existing stores so they meet what they view as the future of the small company.

"The end result is a happier customer who gets more of our time, a new product line and a business that has grown sales about 25 percent in eight months," Scot added.

Now, through [nhgreetingcards.com](#), the Langdons also sell cards that are created in small batches by artists, including photographers, painters and digital artists, 10 of whom live in New Hampshire. All of the artists are independent contractors, and most of them have day jobs as well. Besides the Web site, the artistic cards are available in about six of the 23 stores that sell Card Connection products, according to Langdon. NHGreetingCards will also do completely custom work if requested.

Langdon said a big part of his job is managing the artists.

"Staying in contact and maintaining good relationships with 14 people is a lot of work, although it is enjoyable, so I don't see us growing beyond the people we have right now for a while," he said.

"What I would prefer to do is go deeper within each artist's capabilities rather than adding new artists to the line."



Nashua photographer Joann Vitali says that working with Langdon is a pleasure. Vitali has been a photographer for more than 20 years. She went to school for photography and graphic design, and she works in that field in Milford. Besides color landscape photographs, Vitali also works with digital art, such as applying spot colors to black and white photography.

Although she has traveled extensively and also has a portfolio of cityscapes, Vitali says that her favorite subject is New England.

"I just got back from Acadia and it was breathtaking," she said. "The scenery I used to see in my travels inspired me to become a photographer, and New England is full of great subjects."

Vitali assembles her cards herself, with blank insides, and has created more than 100 so far.

"I don't go out with a plan to shoot pictures specifically for cards," she said. "I drive around a lot on older back roads and see what I can find. Some of it happens to end up on greeting cards."

Lynda Elliot of Manchester has only been working with art for three years; she began after getting laid off from a job in the printing industry when she bought a digital camera and went to school for graphic design. Although some of her work is traditional landscapes, Elliot prefers digital art, in which she takes a photograph and, through the magic of Photoshop, makes it into something which may not even resemble the original picture.

"With the digital art, it kind of flows from a place inside me with no plan in place," she said. "I get a lot of enjoyment from it."

Elliot says she hasn't done a custom project for NHGreetingCards yet, but she has a library of more than 4,000 photos, so "there's already plenty to choose from!" Like Vitali, her "day job," working for a graphic firm in Milford, is related to her art.

Completely opposite in artistic vision from Elliot is Aaron Constant, who believes that "fine art nature photos shouldn't be messed with. I have some images that look digital, but they were all composed within the camera. They may look abstract, but they are created by manipulating my camera by spinning around while shooting straight up or some other process, but not by manipulating the image."

By day, Constant is a vice president at a Concord printing company, which does a lot of fine art catalogs for museums. He has been taking pictures for five years and says that "photography was a hobby that became a passion that became a second career." He is mostly self-taught, but did attend workshops to develop techniques. Constant has about 20 greeting cards in production, but has about 300 images available, any one of which can be made into a card.


Full-time nursing assistant Victoria Arico of Mont Vernon draws and paints her 36 card designs, all of which feature a coffee bean cartoon character named "Bean Baum." Arico says she started drawing cartoons as a teenager, dressing up routine notes to her family with a character they dubbed "Egg Man." "Bean Baum is a pencil sketch superimposed over a painting. I do that part in Photoshop."

Inspiration for her cards, and Bean Baum's adventures, comes from doodling and sometimes from holidays.

"I created an Espresso O'Bean character for St. Patrick's Day last year; that was one I was sort of trying to create and came up with the text before the drawing," she said. "Another time, I was just doodling and added cute little muscles and a cape to Bean Baum. That became both a Father's Day card and a birthday card."

Arico was already selling cards when she met Scot Langdon.

"I had been selling them at a coffee house, and when it changed hands, I had cards ready to go for

another venture," she said. "Scot is a godsend because, like most  44) sell!"

Although Langdon sent out a request to all of the NH Greeting Card artists recently, for something related to fly fishing, Arico said she didn't respond because "Bean Baum hasn't been yet!"

CARD LOCATIONS

Below are a few locations selling the cards:

- A&E Custom Coffee Roastery, Route 101A, Amherst.
- Art Experience, Route 101, Bedford.
- Bursey's Market, Route 101, Wilton.
- Hanover Outdoors, 17½ Lebanon St., Hanover.
- J. Beaner's Coffee House & Cafe, Route 101A, Amherst.
- Mont Vernon General Store, Mont Vernon.
- Mother & Child Clothing & Gifts, Route 101A, Nashua.
- Postal Center USA, junction of routes 101 and 101A on the Amherst/Milford line.
- Sundial Shop, Gilford, Laconia, Meredith.
- YIKES! Gallery of American Craft Fine Arts and Craft Gallery, 23 Main St., Center Harbor, and 676 Main St., Laconia.

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Artwork by Lynda Elliott

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