

# Long Island Business NEWS

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Where Business Gets Down To Business

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## STARTUPS

# Artist turns home into glass house



A stained glass course has morphed into a new business opportunity for Bonnie Bittner.

In 2001, Bonnie Bittner took a stained-glass-making course and "absolutely loved it."

A stay-at-home mom, Bittner "tinkered" with her newfound craft and began making gifts for family and friends.

By October 2005, Bittner was in business for herself, with her company, Glass Art Studios, a firm she operates from her home in Rocky Point.

She sells her work primarily at vendor fairs and home parties. Though most of her creations can be seen in homes in her immediate area, Bittner said one of her commissioned pieces, a panel featuring a pair of frolicking dolphins, resides in a home in Hilton Head.

She currently works with four realtors who send her creations as personalized housewarming gifts to their clients. Realtors benefit from purchasing customized gifts because they "will be remembered," Bittner said. They also "show support for local artists." Bittner is putting together a direct mail piece to target additional realtors as part of a widespread marketing campaign.

Bittner also targets interior designers who can offer her designs for mosaic tables, inset floors (a coating makes the glass sturdy enough to walk on, she said) and kitchen backsplashes.

Startup costs were under \$3,000, with which she purchased a kiln, a saw and glass. Hundred-dollar gift certificates to glass shops came in handy. She purchases half of her stock on line; the rest she likes to hand-pick from a local supplier.

Currently in the planning stages of building a Web site, Bittner posts her work on <http://photos.yahoo.com/glassartstudios> so that interested prospects can get an idea of her range.

Family and friends inspired Bittner to

get her business off the ground. Her sister, for instance, opened her home and invited friends for a showcase of Bittner's work in December 2004.

"I sold so much stuff," Bittner said. "I make the stuff that I like; it's not necessarily mainstream." The experience "gave me more confidence."

Through a friend, Bittner learned about the Women's Expo, a vendor fair where women entrepreneurs can showcase products. Held in October at the Middle Country Public Library in Centereach, last year's event drew 70 exhibitors and 1,500 attendees.

"I gave it a try," Bittner recalled. "I wanted to see how the general public would respond."

Bittner displayed sun catchers, panels, business card holders,

framed mirrors and squares, which resemble a quilt patch. She sold some goods and picked up orders, including one from a Port Jefferson shopkeeper and another from a homeowner who commissioned a piece for an interior door window, Bittner said. Presented by the library and the Long Island Fund for Women and Girls, the expo also offers workshops to help women entrepreneurs build their business skills, all in the name of promoting economic development.

And because Bittner has set up shop in the "small house" she shares with her husband and two teenage children, their buy-in was critical. She even hires her kids to pitch in, separating glass, when needed. Bittner established her studio at the tail end of the laundry room, and tries "not to sprawl into the rest of the house too much."

It's convenient, working from home, but down the road, Bittner hopes to open a shop with room to work on commissioned pieces.

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