

# Sister Success Story

— Two Sisters Gallery —

As soon as we decided upon the theme of "Handmade in Harford" for our holiday issue of HC Style Magazine, it was so easy to choose the featured business for this edition. Not only is there a story to tell about two sisters who combined their talents and passions to create a business together, but also a story about their commitment to promoting fine American craft artisans striving to make a living through their quality workmanship. I am proud to have the opportunity to tell the story of these sibling entrepreneurs embracing American artists and showcasing their unusual and unique pieces in a Harford County gallery.

Debbie Haywood and Bonnie Hardy grew up in a close-knit family in a small town nestled within the Pocono Mountains. Bonnie attended Penn State majoring in accounting where she met her soul mate, Paul. After graduation, they married and spent time in Texas, Colorado and Pittsburgh before settling in Bel Air and starting a successful family self-storage business. Debbie attended school in Boston, moved to Chicago and San Diego before landing in Bel Air. After spending many years at home raising her children, she took a job at the Maryland Institute College of Art in fundraising. It was at MICA that Debbie became enamored with the idea of opening a store to showcase American artists. Her sister Bonnie was in a comfortable place with other family members running the self-storage company, so she was excited about the prospect of taking on a new challenge. The timing was just right for the two sisters to join together as business partners and create Two Sisters Gallery in Downtown Bel Air.

Successfully combining Debbie's love of art with Bonnie's accounting background, the sisters opened their gallery on Main Street in October of 2003. And for the past nine years, Bonnie has taken care of the business side of things and Debbie has managed the website and marketing. They both love to shop so traveling and buying items for the store is their favorite thing to do together.

"We started small...feeling out the community. Over the years, our customers have helped guide us in our selections for the gallery," said Bonnie and Debbie. Greeting and getting to know customers and developing relationships with them is what both sisters enjoy the most about their day-to-day activities.

**"We have a wonderful base of customers who we know by name. They have become part of the Two Sisters family," stated the sisters in unison.**

Bella, Debbie's pug, is the official greeter at Two Sisters. Bella is 9 years old, the same age as Two Sisters Gallery. "She was a puppy when we started.....she's grown up with the business."



Debbie Haywood & Bonnie Hardy in their gallery on Main Street in Bel Air





After doubling their space three years ago, Two Sisters will celebrate their 9th year anniversary the weekend of November 17th with trunk shows and special events. The sisters opened the business in 2003 featuring the work of about 15 artists. They have now expanded to showcasing the work of over 100 national artists.

**“In assembling inventory for our store, our goal is to have something for everyone who walks through the door. Typically we have handmade items from a few dollars to several hundred dollars. We try to have items for everyone’s price point,”** stated Debbie.

Over the years, the customer base for the business has expanded through Internet sales so the sisters have formed telephone and email relationships with customers from all over the country. No matter if the customer is greeted at the front door, or on the phone or by email, Bonnie and Debbie pride themselves in delivering top-notch customer service which they believe helps to keep their customers coming back.

The sisters also strive to keep their merchandise fresh and interesting. They are well aware that in this tight economy, people are not just randomly buying items but are much more serious in their buying habits. The sisters believe their customers want value and quality and choose items that they will enjoy for years to come.

To keep their items unique, fresh and interesting, the sisters seek out artists and choose their works carefully. They find their artists mostly through high quality art shows. Many artists seek them out as well.

**“We ultimately choose artisan-made items that speak to us and we steer clear of disposable Chinese-imported products. Creativity and quality workmanship are essential. And everything must be made in North America,”** said the owners.

They are proud of their collection of American-made fine craft in all mediums - jewelry, blown glass, ceramics, metalwork and fiber arts. Some of the most unique items include hand-hammered sterling silver jewelry, gemstone jewelry, wheel-thrown ceramics, hand-painted pottery, recycled junk yard finds made into wine holders, plant holders, garden art, salad bowls made from solid pieces of wood burl. The gallery also features spirit tiles - finely ground colored glass hand painted on copper, then fired in a kiln, with quotes embedded on the sides and ornaments made from duck and goose eggs depicting the 12 days of Christmas. There are many items in the gallery that can be personalized for wedding gifts.

The two sisters hope to continue promoting American craft artisans at their place of business. They are delighted to be a part of the buy-local movement and hope that the momentum to shop local and to buy American products continues to resonate with more and more people.

Take some time to visit Bonnie and Debbie in their gallery at 328 S. Main Street in Downtown Bel Air. In addition to their anniversary celebration in November, they will hold a Holiday Open House on Saturday and Sunday, December 1st and 2nd.

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