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Grand Rapids Business Journal

January 9, 2006

Being Lone Granger Works For One Son

Gary Granger comes from a long line of family entrepreneurs

His great uncle left West Michigan in the 1930s to attend college in Lansing. He worked part-time for a construction company and, when the company's owner ran into some difficulty meeting his financial obligations, decided to step in and take over the operation.

He invited his brother, Keith, who was also Gary's grandfather, to join the business. Together, they built churches, commercial buildings and other structures in Michigan for the next 20 years. The pair even developed what was the first "kit" approach to building log cabins.

By 1958, there were enough family members - and enough different interests - to prompt the two brothers to peel off portions of their successful venture and create two new companies. Keith Granger and his three sons, including Gary's father, Alton, started what grew into Granger Construction.

The success in that venture led to the development of additional construction related businesses, including those that specialized in solid waste, excavating and landfills. As the oldest of the third generation, Gary started working for the family company in 1977 after finishing a degree in architectural engineering at the University of Colorado.

Yet in 1996, after nearly 20 years of working for his father, Gary decided to leave the family business and strike out in his own direction - a decision he said was very difficult.

"Any time a business goes through a parting of company, it's always a heartbreaker," Granger said. "My dad always had more of an interest in being a builder and handling the construction side of things. I was always more focused on the actual transaction and being able to put together projects.

"I was very anxious to take over and I wanted to say to my father, 'Here's what we're going to do with the business.' I was ready to move out of Michigan and take on more development and financing. I saw the business growing faster in some ways than I think he was comfortable with.

At the time I left he was holding me back. But when I look back now, he had the right to do what he wanted to do. It was his business, not mine. When a son finds himself in that situation with his father, the question becomes how do you move on with grace and dignity?"

Navigating The Transition

Gary Granger likened this juncture in his family's business to a plant that has outgrown its pot and needs to be separated in order to have its own breathing room.

"I think that's what we had to be able to experience with one another in order to continue to grow and to respect one another, he recalled. I ended up deciding that for me to move ahead. I needed to leave and form a new business. I think he also felt that there comes a point where in order for both individuals to have their needs met, that was probably the decision that needed to happen."

He signed a non-compete with his father before leaving in 1996 to launch the Granger Group, a network of companies that seeks to offer a full complement of real estate services - but no construction operations. Those companies include:

- Granger Financial Services which offers construction financing, permanent debt financing, equity and leasing options.
- Granger Planning & Development, which offers comprehensive construction project management.
- Intellisys, a trademarked assembly and delivery process for delivering buildings from pre-construction planning to move-in.
- Investment Property Management, which provides property and asset management to real estate investors.
- SmartPlace, a partnership with Herman Miller to equip office facilities anywhere in the country
- Ambulon, a consortium of companies that provides one-stop shopping for medical and surgical facilities, including equipment purchases.

"The vision I had was on the integration of the business," said Granger, who serves as president and CEO of the Granger Group. "I've had the opportunity to study case studies of other industries and see what's working. Those industries that have improved and changed the most over the past 20 years are those that have integrated their processes

"Fundamentally, they changed the way they did business so that they could grow exponentially while offering a better quality of service. Our industry is only just in the beginning stages of that process - were like the cowboys and the pioneers on the range.

Today, the Granger Group has 30 employees, and is "aggressively looking for 'A' players," according to Granger. The company works on projects around Michigan and

throughout the country: the current key local project is the construction of the Metro Health Village along the new South Beltline.

Granger said he is excited to be able to work with Metro and is looking forward to the challenges of the growth ahead for the Granger Group. He envisions “a very different kind of development company” that will be involved with training, education, procurement, finances and a host of other issues essential to the real estate process.

And he thinks the chances are good that his two sons, Jason and Ryan, will join him in the business, although he’s encouraging them to spread their wings at other companies first.

“It’s important for young people who want to go into the family business to have some outside experience,” Granger said. A family business is not a money tree, nor is it about taking advantage of your family status. It's about what you put back into it.

'You have to look at yourself as the steward of the business so that it will carry on from generation to generation. It's a process of growth and development for all family members who want to participate.’”

The Grand Rapids Press

January 13, 2006

GR film students capture Midwest snowboard culture

You've seen the movies -- "Tangerine Dream," "Endless Summer" and "Steeper and Deeper." They feature a half-dozen guys and girls roaming through a country, or even a continent, on surfboards, snowboards, skateboards or skis.

It looks like the sweet life.

Everyone is either jumping off mammoth cliffs, riding the curl of monster waves or carving down mind blowing fields of pristine snow. You wonder how you, too, can get a gig like that.

There is a way.

Marc Moline, Steve Cummings, and Jake Richardson aren't sitting back wondering "what if?"

The seniors at Kendall College of Art and Design are making that dream happen by creating their own snowboarding film.

"My absolute number one passion is snowboarding," said Moline, a Rockford High School graduate. "The second is graphic design and multi-media.

"To keep us as involved as possible in both our art and riding, we began brainstorming the making of a Midwest snowboard film. Over the past six or seven months, a few small ideas have become a full-blown production."

The Concept

Their film -- "Midwest What!" -- will combine footage shot by the creators in addition to clips submitted by other riders. It will show snowboarders in Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota and Indiana.

"We sent out packets of information about the production last summer and we've gotten a lot of (snowboarding) shops interested." Moline, 23, said. "We also have resorts that are interested and want us to shoot there so they have representation in the film. People from all over the Midwest have said they're going to be submitting their own video. The response has been overwhelming."

Every day, when Moline checks his e-mail, there are more video clips and letters from snowboarders excited about the project.

As the snowboarding season winds down, the producers will have to review and edit all the footage, then find a way to get it distributed. Their goal is to have the finished product debut in the fall on DVD under the name of Antix Media.

"We're trying to show snowboarding through the eyes of the rider," Moline said. "We hope to have some narration points to spice things up a bit. And we'll include some natural audio, too."

Imagine it. Then do it.

Making movies isn't just for the Spielbergs anymore. As digital video cameras and production software have improved, so has the quality of independent films. Some Web sites now offer amateur movie makers a forum to submit their clips.

The most popular site is www.ifilm.com, which shows amateur and professional videos, movies, trailers and viral videos. It's been so successful that MTV jumped into the on-demand film train and bought ifilm last fall.

Clips are sorted by category and run anywhere from 30 seconds to several minutes.

Extreme sports fans will want to click on the "action sports/adrenaline" tab to find video shorts involving skate, snow, surf and water sports, plus slams and mid-air stunts.

Although a few indie films take producers to the big time of movie-making, Moline isn't creating a DVD for fame or profit, he said.

"It's for the benefit of the snowboarding community here in the Midwest," Moline said.

"There's so much talent here in the Midwest, it's ridiculous. There are kids who are lapping the tow ropers, accessing the jumps and doing the same rails over and over. They get so good."

Ken Taylor, a snowboard instructor at Cannonsburg Ski Area, agrees.

"It's been long overdue," Taylor, 25, said of Moline's movie. "There's always been a huge skiing and snowboarding culture in the Midwest. Each area of the country has their own culture, and the Midwest has its own quirks. It's cool that someone's finally going to show it."

The Grand Rapids Press

January 13, 2006

Festival's poster gets new look

HOLLAND -- Grand Rapids artist Kenneth Cadwallader's impressionistic "Splash of Tulips" will be the image on this year's Tulip Time Festival poster.

"We are delighted with Kenneth's work showcasing the tulip through this fine canvas print," says Tamra Bouman, the festival's executive director.

The festival plans to offer a higher quality limited-edition poster this year.

Replacing the 500 signed 24-by-36-inch poster will be 250 signed and numbered 21-by-27-inch limited edition giclee canvas prints that will sell for \$195 -- three times the cost of limited-edition posters last year.

"We just feel we are taking the poster to the new level," Bouman said.

The giclee process takes a high-resolution digital image of the painting, runs it through a computer connected to a specialized printer and sprays the inks onto archival art paper or synthetic canvas.

Giclees produce an image as close to the original as possible.

Although the specialized process is time-consuming to produce, the image provides detail and color that can last up to 200 years.

Each limited-edition giclee of "Splash of Tulips" will be signed by the artist and comes with a certificate of authenticity.

In addition to the limited-edition giclee, the poster image also will be available on 18-by-24-inch posters for \$30, and 8-by-10-inch posters in addition to notecards, mugs and clothing.

The soft hues of the impressionist "Splash of Tulips" is a departure from the style of festival posters in recent years.

Initial interest is strong, and Bouman expects the posters to sell out.

From Southwest Michigan, Cadwallader studied at Kendall College of Art and Design before studying abroad at the Royal College of Arts in London, where he began to develop his impressionistic style.

Next he headed to Chicago, where he studied at the Palette and Chisel Academy, where his career took off. He finished his formal learning at the Loveland Academy of Fine Art in Colorado.

"I'm excited to be a part of this year's Tulip Time Festival," Cawallader said.

"'Splash of Tulips' was inspired by the true beauty of the tulip. The painting encompasses the soft grace of the tulip and the joy that the Tulip Time Festival brings. Using impressionistic brush strokes, I chose subtle hues of pinks, blues, whites and greens to bring the painting alive," Cadwallader said.

The Detroit News

January 22, 2006

Ferris State deal allows OCC credits

An agreement between Oakland Community College and Ferris State University in Big Rapids will enable OCC students to apply all of their associate's degree credits toward a bachelor's degree of Applied Science in Industrial Technology and Management from Ferris State. The agreement permits OCC students to transfer up to 87 credit hours to Ferris State; standard transfer agreements allow only 62 credit hours. A total of 124 credits are required to earn the Ferris bachelor's degree. OCC students may take their final year of Ferris courses at their OCC Auburn Hills campus.
Farmington Hills

Pioneer

January 26, 2006

FSU students offer radon, microwave testing

BIG RAPIDS - Big Rapids and Mecosta County residents again have the opportunity to have their homes tested for health endangering radon gas by the Environmental Health and Safety Association. In addition, the EHSA, a professional organization of students in the Environmental Health and Safety Management program at Ferris State University, will conduct tests for non-ionizing radiation leakage in microwave ovens.

The Environmental Protection Agency acknowledges that radon, the radioactive gas caused by the disintegration of radium, is a significant problem and recommends that all homes nationwide be tested. Homes constructed close to bedrock have a potentially greater risk than homes built on a deep soil base. According to the EPA, radon is suspected to be the second leading cause of lung cancer, following smoking, responsible for more than 20,000 lung cancer deaths annually.

In past years, EHSA testing resulted in approximately 12 area homes having radon levels above the EPA action level. The EPA suggests that radon levels in homes average less than four picocuries per liter of air. Area homes average less than one picocurie.

Since the equipment is not designed for use in apartment buildings or commercial establishments, EHSA's tests are conducted in detached, single family homes. The test consists of placing a noiseless machine in the home for 24 hours. Homeowners usually receive a report within a week. If levels are found, the group provides recommendations for further testing.

Methods to correct radon include sealing cracks, and various methods of collecting and venting the gas.

"The microwave testing being offered is valuable for peace of mind," said EHSM senior Thomas R. Bramble. "Although most microwave ovens are free from leaks, even new ones can be damaged in shipping and have the potential of leaking radiation."

EHSA can test all microwave ovens free of excessive food debris with a simple procedure taking only minutes. There is no charge for either testing, but a donation is requested to help defray the cost of calibrating equipment and supplies, and to support student travel to state and national meetings.

Residents desiring radon screening and microwave testing should call Nancy Alles at (231) 591-2266.

The Detroit Free Press

January 26, 2006

Big waste found at state universities

Michigan's public universities have offered thousands of sparsely attended classes, allowed thousands of students to pad grades by taking the same classes over and over, and sometimes failed to monitor or correct faculty performance.

Those findings - issued in state audits - suggest that taxpayer-supported universities could do more to tighten operations as they battle for more government funding in dire economic times. The auditors' concerns come as students and parents face stiff annual tuition increases.

Universities "can't seem to keep the reins on costs," said Larry Paulson, a 53-year-old network engineer from Livonia struggling to save for his ninth-grade son's college bills.

The Free Press reviewed performance reports of 11 state universities issued by the Michigan auditor general since 2000. Those audits questioned:

Faculty performance. At Western Michigan University, more than 35% of full-time faculty examined by auditors taught only half-time or less. WMU also lacked clear standards for giving professors time away from teaching. At three other schools, administrators did not address students' repeated complaints about professors' poor language or teaching skills.

Documentation of sabbaticals. Auditors found professors at three universities had not properly explained how they used paid sabbaticals. At Michigan Technological University, for example, some professors were granted new sabbaticals without documenting how they spent past ones, a violation of university policy.

Students repeating classes. In spot checks at six universities, auditors found more than 3,800 instances of students taking the same course three or more times. More than 1,500 Wayne State University students did so, mainly to replace poor or incomplete grades, a practice auditors suggested was an inefficient use of taxpayer money.

Class offerings. Auditors questioned whether universities were wasting money on thousands of classes with low enrollment. For example, 471 classes examined by auditors at the University of Michigan-Flint had 10 or fewer students, well below suggested enrollment guidelines.

"I don't think anybody pays attention to what" universities "do with the money, for the most part," said Rep. Lorence Wenke, R-Richland, who chairs a House higher education policy committee. He noted with chagrin that he, too, was unaware of the auditor general reports.

University officials contend that small classes are a necessity - and worthwhile - in some cases and that professors frequently have to balance classroom time with research of value to the university and public.

Otherwise, administrators agreed with many audit findings and said they are making improvements. In recent years, they've cut expenses and pooled buying power to save millions of dollars on natural gas, office supplies, employee benefits and other things.

The biggest problem on campus is not inefficiency, said a lobbyist for Michigan's university system, but dramatic cuts in state funding.

"These are times of shrinking public responsibility to higher education," said Michael Boulus, executive director of the Presidents Council, State Universities of Michigan. "Overall, these institutions are well-run."

No doubt, Michigan's universities, and students, face lean times. This school year, in-state university students are paying \$1,400 more than the national average in tuition and fees. Last fall's tuition increases averaged 12%, the third-highest in the nation.

Compounding that, the amount of money universities received from the state this year - \$1.4 billion - is 12% lower than four years ago.

As state universities are set to begin state budget negotiations in February, some tuition-paying parents and legislators call for greater accountability.

Michigan Auditor General Thomas McTavish, the state's top financial watchdog, audited all but four of the state's 15 public universities since 2000. Three more - Eastern Michigan, Ferris State, and Saginaw Valley State - were audited in the late 1990s. The University of Michigan-Ann Arbor has not received a performance audit since 1984.

A U-M audit "would take a tremendous amount of resources," said Michael Becker, who leads the agency's university audit team. "Certainly U of M will be coming up in the next year or two."

Universities responded to the recent audits with a range of explanations and changes.

A 2000 audit found that Western Michigan lacked a consistent policy for releasing faculty members from teaching duties. WMU President Judi Bailey noted in an interview, however, that a faculty contract signed in the fall clearly spells out how and to what extent professors may pursue activities outside class. Research, academic advising, one-on-one instruction and other factors all affect teaching workloads, Bailey said.

"Teaching is not the whole job," agreed Paul Pancella, president of WMU's faculty senate. "The trend at our university, in particular, is to get more involved in research outside the classroom."

At the University of Michigan-Dearborn, auditors said the school lacked a database to track teaching loads. The audit also cited a department chairman who failed to schedule himself for enough classes. The university recently set up a task force on teaching hours.

U-M Dearborn, Michigan Tech and Oakland University officials said they are all trying to improve oversight of teaching problems.

Michigan Tech acknowledged it could better address a few instances of "ineffective teaching." U-M Dearborn and Oakland University administrators said they are more closely reviewing the teaching and language skills of new hires. Auditors found those universities promoted several professors despite persistent complaints from students about communication skills.

At U-M Dearborn, for instance, auditors documented 295 student complaints against eight faculty members. Despite those concerns, two of the faculty members received promotions and none received training to improve speech clarity.

"That's like running a business without feedback," said U-M Dearborn student government president Tarek Baydoun. He said his group wants seats on faculty promotion committees to assure professors are held accountable.

After auditors raised concerns about sabbaticals, professors at Michigan State University, Central Michigan University and Michigan Tech submitted overdue sabbatical reports.

Beginning next fall, Wayne State students must get permission from academic advisers before taking courses a third time. Administrators at U-M Flint and Northern Michigan University now use software to identify and limit serial class takers.

Some administrators chafed at auditors' concerns over small class sizes. They noted that professional regulations require very small class settings for nursing and other health care students, for example. Some argued they must offer small classes at off-hours to meet the diverse needs of commuter students.

Still, U-M Flint cut low-enrollment classes in half after its 2002 audit.

U-M Dearborn initially resisted auditors' calls to better control class size. Then the economy forced the university to reduce the number of classes offered by 5% last fall.

"That turned out to be a very successful endeavor," said U-M Dearborn Chancellor Daniel Little. "We're all having to do more with less."

The Daily News

January 27, 2006

Doctor goes abroad to help others' vision

GREENVILLE - When Dr. Rachel Hollenbeck stepped off the tiny airplane and onto the soil of the island of Dominica, she was relieved.

"I was so glad to be there," Hollenbeck said. "We had such a choppy landing. Once I started to look around, I saw all the green and lushness of the country. Then the next view is of the Atlantic Ocean. The ocean is only 200 yards away from where we landed."

Hollenbeck, a native of South Dakota and an optometrist with Grand Rapids Ophthalmology in Greenville, was one of 28 people, including six doctors and four optometry students from Ferris State University, who volunteered their services in Dominica for 10 days performing eye examinations.

The retinoscopy technique they used involves shining a special light into a patient's eye. Doctors can tell by the way the pupil reacts if the person is near-sighted, far-sighted or has astigmatism.

The rest of the people on the trip were trained to distribute eyeglasses or sunglasses collected by Lions Clubs around the region. They also helped out where needed such as taking blood pressure readings and checking in people.

Hollenbeck, 31, resides in Rockford with her husband, Tim. The group she went to Dominica with was called Volunteer Optometrists Serving Humanity (VOSH).

"She was a great asset to the trip," VOSH volunteer Deana Halsey of Eaton Rapids Optometry in Lansing said of Hollenbeck. "She was really able to jump in. We served 480 people on one day. She kept right up with everybody."

The group was in the eastern Caribbean island nation until returning Monday. During the stay, the volunteers provided exams and services for 1,400 people in Grand Bay, Marigot, Portsmouth, Roseau and St. Joseph.

"The best thing is we were able to help out," Hollenbeck said. "We were really needed."

She said the island of about 70,000 people has only one optometrist and one ophthalmologist.

"In the United States, the No. 1 cause of blindness is disease," Hollenbeck said.

"Worldwide that is not the case. It is not having a pair of prescription glasses and not wearing sunglasses."

She said there are basically two financial levels in Dominica.

"There aren't a lot of middle-class people," Hollenbeck said. "There, you are either very rich or very poor."

Although the country is not as well off as the United States, she said most residents have cellular telephones. The country's terrain actually requires more high-tech features than America.

"The whole country is wireless," Hollenbeck said. "Because it is so hilly it would be too expensive to run all that cable."

She said she plans to volunteer for another trip sometime in the future, but may go to another country.

"Dominica is great," Hollenbeck said. "I know a lot of people. I would like to work with VOSH again because you don't see the country as a tourist, you see the country from the people who live there's point of view."

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Pioneer

January 27, 2006

Group gives encouragement packages to student teachers

BIG RAPIDS - Ferris State University student teachers will soon receive a little shot in the arm of extra encouragement.

Beta Kappa, the local chapter of the Delta Kappa Gamma Society International, an honor society for educators, prepared "care packages" for each of the 42 student teachers this semester at Ferris.

"Teaching is not an easy job," said Pat Little, local chapter president. "In today's world, there're a lot more requirements, more experiences, a lot more mastery kinds of things.... They're under a lot of stress to learn how to do their job the best they can."

Little said her group's goal was to let the future teachers know somebody believes in them - to encourage their efforts.

The packages, in reusable insulated lunch bags, contain snacks, a disposable camera, hand sanitizer gel and various office supplies teachers use often.

"It's just a little thing to give them a smile and encouragement, to say 'We support you,'" she said. "They are important and they can do this job, even though there're a lot of requirements. I think they will enjoy getting a little treat, a little support and encouragement. Sometimes in winter, the blahs kind of get you down."

Little acknowledges the student teachers will already have many of the things in the bags, but the goal of her organization is not to give them things, but motivation.

"It's just the idea that someone else thought enough of what they're doing and hopefully that encourage; them."

Detroit Free Press

January 27, 2006

State universities must track down and trim waste

Michigan's public universities turn out undeniably bright and well-trained graduates. It is equally undeniable, though, that these schools need to do more to track and trim waste.

After examining state audit performance reports for 11 of Michigan's 15 universities since 2000, the Free Press revealed this week patterns of inefficiencies. Left uncorrected, some of the problems could undermine universities' political leverage in battling budget cuts. Citizens who fund higher education are well within their right to ask whether they are getting the smartest use of their tax dollars.

Auditors found that several universities lacked clear standards for granting sabbaticals to professors or documenting how they used paid time off. At six universities, there were 3,800 instances of students repeating the same course more than three times. Persistence pays, yes, but there is a point of diminishing returns.

Classes with low enrollment, sometimes fewer than 10 students, raised auditors' eyebrows, too. Sometimes a small student-teacher ratio vastly improves the education experience, and in coursework such as nursing, it's necessary. But universities also ought to look at whether classes that draw low interest can be consolidated or offered less frequently, something University of Michigan's Flint and Dearborn campuses were able to do successfully in the wake of audits and tight budgets.

Oddly, though, the main U-M campus -- whose size alone makes it a veritable petri dish for redundancy and lack of oversight -- has not been audited in more than 20 years. The state, while promising a review in the next year or two, seems daunted by the size of the job. It needs to get on it.

Education, by nature, is a personal experience, not just a bottom-line business. All aspects of it may not fit the perfect efficiency study, particularly, in some cases, with the unwieldy size of the student and teaching bodies. But universities still must pay more attention to detail and look for ways to deliver their services, well, smarter. Otherwise they are just inviting further scrutiny from budget-minded lawmakers, with results they might find much more onerous than a mere audit.

Kalamazoo Gazette

January 29, 2006

'Water is Wide' moviestar is son of Gobles couple

Jeff Hephner's story of stardom sounds like a movie script.

Hephner, who stars as Pat Conroy in the CBS movie "The Water is Wide" airing at 9 tonight, moved to Florida after graduating from Ferris State University in 1999. He worked for a semi-professional baseball team by day and served booze by night. It was the latter that led to his career in TV and film, said his father, Tom Hephner of Gobles.

In 1999, Jeff Hephner served then-budding actor Colin Ferrell drinks often and the two started a friendship. That relationship resulted in Hephner getting the role of "McManus" in Ferrell's 2000 breakout hit "Tigerland." Since then, he's garnered roles in several prominent TV shows, including "The O.C." and "Law and Order."

His parents, Tom and Donna Hephner, have lived in Gobles since 2000. Tom Hephner retired seven years ago after coaching at Adrian High School and Adrian College for a combined 34 years. Donna Hephner is the program manager of the Kalamazoo County Probation/Parole Office.

The couple spent a few days in Los Angeles earlier this week for the premiere of "The Water is Wide" on Jan. 24.

"I thought it was great. It's a Hallmark movie -- it's a feel-good movie," Tom Hephner said. "He really never did any studying for acting. He got into community theater in Florida and he just had a dream. I'm really proud of him for following his dream."

Hephner, 30, graduated in 1994 from Sand Creek High School near Adrian where he was an all-state football and basketball player. He went on to captain the Ferris State basketball team. Soon after graduating, he took a job with a semi-pro baseball team in Jacksonville. About that time, he began acting in community-theater productions.

Ferrell, who has starred in "Alexander" (2004) and "Phone Booth" (2002), was filming "Tigerland" at Camp Blanding in Starke, Fla., and frequented Hephner's bar during the taping.

After his role in "Tigerland," which featured a few speaking lines, Hephner moved to New York. He discussed the major career move with his parents.

"We had a little discussion about how tough it was going to be. I said, 'If you're going to go, it'll be tough, but we'll help you,'" Tom Hephner said. "He was pretty determined.

There wasn't much changing his mind."

Currently, Hephner is playing Matt Ramsey on Fox's popular TV series "The O.C." He's also played the lead prosecutor on Fox's "The Jury" and had a role on "Law and Order: Criminal Intent" this summer. He also appeared on "The Tony Danza Show" on Friday.

The Grand Rapids Press

January 29, 2006

Working artists discuss finding jobs in real world

GRAND RAPIDS -- The competition is stiff, secure full-time jobs are few, and you may spend as little as 20 percent of your time actually making art. On top of that, your work won't get much respect in the world of fine art.

Even with a sales pitch like that, the field of commercial illustration continues to attract thousands of college graduates every year hungry to make a living doing what they love.

This group includes the 12 artists in "360: Illustrators Come Full Circle," the current exhibit at the Kendall College of Art and Design gallery.

Back to school

The show features the artwork of a dozen Kendall graduates from the past two decades who have succeeded as illustrators and lived to tell about it. About eight of them will visit the campus to relate their stories as part of Kendall's Illustration Program, "Career Day," at a panel discussion Tuesday and then informally at the show's reception that evening.

(The morning panel discussion with the illustrators is for Kendall students, but other who want to attend should call Christine Brown at 451-2787, ext. 1150, to see if space is available.)

"We want to show the practical end of things," said Michael Moore, a 1993 graduate who works full-time as a graphic artist at The Grand Rapids Press. "We want to show them what happens after you get your degree, what's the first step you need to take."

Moore organized "360" with Milt Klingensmith, a 1992 graduate who also works full-time at the Press (each has three works in the show). Klingensmith said he wants to give students tips about how to succeed as a freelancer, which is how most of the artists in "360" make a living.

"Commercial artists need to be able to work with art directors. Fine artists don't do that.

You need to convince the art director ybu're the person for the job," Klingensmith said.

"You only spend 20-40 percent of the time making art. The rest is spent dealing with art directors and advertising yourself."

Diverse approaches

"360" features a broad range of stylistic approaches to illustration, from anime-inspired cartoons to folk-art riffs. This diversity differs from the real world, where much duplication of popular styles occurs, Moore and Klingensmith said.

"We wanted to show successful people who were going their own direction and not trying to emulate celebrity illustrators," Klingensmith said.

The images in "360" are generally pleasing to the eye, accessible, clever, creative and well-crafted. They make easier viewing than the work in a typical art exhibit, although they don't keep you engaged as long as a multilayered, contemporary art piece might.

That's not necessarily a bad thing, Moore said.

"This type of show can reach more people than a fine art show, because it has been made for the masses. It's seen by many more people than a fine art show," said Moore, who also acknowledged, "the work isn't made to last. It's made for a quick view and then it's tossed, so the works don't stand the test of time, but they have universal appeal."

"360" also demonstrates a gray area where commercial and fine art can overlap. At least two pieces in the show got their start as artwork created by the illustrator for personal enjoyment, not a job.

In each case -- Christy DeHoog Johnson's acrylic and pastel collage painting, "Tower at Sunset," which appeared in a Steelcase Foundation annual report; and Jody Williams' painting, "Target," which ran in a Kent County Literacy Program piece -- the work was seen in a gallery, after which the artist was contacted to use it in a publication.

The Grand Rapids Business Journal

January 30, 2006

Jeup Fashions Furniture

JENISON - On a recent trip to Sloan Miyasato, the San Francisco dealer of Jeup Furniture Inc., President and CEO Joe Jeup was met with a unique question from another furniture designer.

"Where the hell did you guys come from?" the man probed. "One day you were here and then all of a sudden you were just doing everything."

The answer: Jenison.

"Most people are extremely surprised when they walk through this facility," Jeup said of his 20-employee manufacturing operation tucked a block off Port Sheldon Road and Chicago Drive in Jenison.

It's not that unusual, he explained, for a couture design shop to be hidden in flyover country. After all, a fellow named Eames used to do it in Zeeland. But still, even with West Michigan's industry knowledge and infrastructure, it's a surprise to find the upstart company here.

"I've got a lot of friends that have been in the business for probably 10 to 20 times longer, and obviously, they've had no choice but to go to those foreign countries to get product made," Jeup said. "But there is still wonderful opportunity for design.

The education base is still here, probably will be for many years to come. This is a gem for the nation, honestly."

A young woodshop and architecture junkie from Clinton Township, Jeup was introduced to the trade at Kendall College of Art and Design in Grand Rapids. From there, he took a job at a small outfit called Designers Workshop, a sister company of John Widdicomb, a furniture manufacturer that has since moved to New York.

Five years later, when Designers Workshop was struggling in a rapidly changing market, its owners were looking for an exit and turned to the 28-year-old Jeup. He bought the company, renamed it Jeup Furniture, and began retooling it for a creative flair and a new market.

"I didn't know a lot about what I was doing when I started," Jeup said. "Thankfully for me, I had a pretty strong vision of what market I wanted to tackle."

Jeup aimed his startup at the high-fashion furniture world. Still new to the business, he hadn't learned how to make a low-margin, commodity-type product - and he didn't intend to.

"I wanted my company to be unique and special," he said. "I founded the company around innovation, design and quality."

Eighty percent of the firm's clients are residential, with most of the pieces customized to fit or match a particular space, sometimes with the customer's own material. Every piece is hand-signed and numbered by Jeup himself. The pieces are sold primarily through interior designers and architects, with only a small percentage buying direct.

The clients are high-profile to say the least: actors, athletes, musicians and the business elite - "people who know what they want, and are willing to pay for it," Jeup explained.

"That's what Our customers come to us for. They want to have their cake and eat it too," Jeup said.

"Technically speaking, we sell service. This is what our clients are missing in imports: flexibility."

While he argues that his market isn't "recession- proof," he did note that roughly 80 percent of the nation's wealth rests in this small demographic.

Another 20 percent of his business is hospitality: purchases of a few dozen pieces at a time by high-end hotels such as The Four Seasons, Ritz-Carlton, Wynn Resorts and Marriott.

"My product line is a great value, but it's not priced for the average consumer," he said. "You won't see it at Crate & Barrel - at least I hope not. I have had them rip off our products a couple of times."

It's a compliment to be copied, he said. All the leaders in innovation get copied, from BMW to Apple and, locally, Herman Miller.

"I don't mean that in an egotistical way at all," he said. "I like to think that we're innovators, and others are following suit. ... If not I get really angry."

The company's ascent into high fashion began at the Chicago Design Show in its first year. The main goal, Jeup said, was to be noticed. By the end of the three-day affair, he had a dealer in Chicago. Instead of carting his product back home to Jenison, it stayed at the Merchandise Mart, a few floors down in The Bright Group's permanent showroom.

"In my opinion, that was a grand slam," Jeup recalled.

Eight years later his products are now on display in Los Angeles, San Francisco, Boston, Atlanta, Minneapolis, Miami, Chicago, Scottsdale and Denver, along with Jeup's personal favorites: Taipei, Taiwan and Hong Kong.

Last year, his company was featured in The China Times, one of largest newspapers in Asia.

"We've entered China by exporting, not importing."

Interestingly, he has no showroom in Michigan, just the manufacturing facility. "People ask why I don't have a showroom here. I tell them there's no market," he said. "The closest market is Chicago. You can design and build it anywhere, but then you have to sell it." As an example, there was the initial response to his business plan.

"People couldn't fathom that we were going to sell a table for \$4,000, because they wouldn't do it themselves," he said. "I told them, 'Don't worry about whether it's going to sell. Just do it.'"

Jeup credits some of those initial skeptics, his first employees, for the company's success.

"I know it's corny to say, but it couldn't be more true - you can't do it alone," he said

"It's not about me, it's about team. The men and women who work here are artisans."

The Enquirer

January 30, 2006

Marshall artist thinks big by thinking small

In 1956, David Koenig, then a high school student, took a picture of a kitten curled up in his slippers at his parents' farmhouse.

"We had a lot of cats on our farm. I think they drank more milk than I did," said the 1957 Marshall High School graduate. "I took the picture with my Brownie camera."

Thirty years later, in 1986, he found that old black-and-white photo in a box. And he decided to give it a new life.

Using colored pencils and a magnifying glass, Koenig recreated the piece - at a size of 2 1/4 by 3 7/8 inches - and named it "Security."

Koenig submitted "Security" to the Miniature Art Society of New Jersey contest and won an honorable mention award.

"I sold that one," he said. "So I was enthused to do more."

Koenig's interest in miniature art started in early 1986 when he saw a notice in the back of "American Artist Magazine" for a miniature art contest.

According to the Web site miniature-art.com, miniature art is extremely detailed work. It also is colorful work with great composition. It can be no more than a one-sixth scale of the actual subject.

"When I saw the requirements, I thought, 'I can do that,'" he said. "I thought (the photo with the kitten) would make a good miniature art piece because of all the detail in it."

Over the years, Koenig has won several awards and has had his work published in books.

Earlier this month, he took home second place in the Miniature Art Society of Florida show for his entry "Oh, That Moan of the Cello" in the human figure category.

This year 1,100 works were submitted from around the world to the Florida show, according to MASF Press Representative Kay Petryszak.

"I was glad to hear that I won," Koenig said. "I submitted five pieces. I always figure I have a chance, but you never know what the judges want. You are at their mercy."

Koenig's art will be on display at the MASF show, which takes place in Clearwater, Fla., until Feb. 5.

With all the miniature art that Koenig has done, he and the farmhouse kitten piece have something special in common: They both took decades before their artistic appeal was publicly realized.

Koenig, 67, started working for Manufactured Homes Inc. in Marshall, right after high school. Koenig said his dad got him the job.

But his passion was art.

He said signs of his artistic ability started when he was a child.

"Art was my God-given talent. I started drawing when I started to walk. You have to know that something is going on there," he said. "I drew on everything."

So in 1980, at age 41, he quit the manufacturing job and headed to Kendall College of Art and Design in Grand Rapids. Koenig said he was ready for a change.

"I never ventured out like that before. I worked with Manufactured Homes Inc. for over 20 years. I was taking a chance," he said.

It was at Kendall that Koenig's peers took notice of his meticulous nature.

"When I first started (at Kendall), instructors would tell me not to be so serious about the details," Koenig said.

But it was his love for detail that got him noticed nationally.

And Koenig likes how it sets him apart from other artists.

"I like doing things small. I like to draw so when someone looks at it, they wonder how I did it."

Pioneer

February 2, 2006

Friends of Ferris prepare

Auction item: The Friends of Ferris Fund-raiser Committee is solidifying plans for the 17 annual dinner/auction fund-raiser, set for Feb. 18 at the Holiday Inn Hotel & Conference Center in Big Rapids. Tickets are now available from Friends of Ferris members at a cost of \$50 per person. This year's theme is "Enjoy the Great Outdoors" and the evening will begin with social time at 5:30 p.m. and dinner at 7:30 p.m. The committee members Edward Burch and Maxine McClelland look over an item donated for the auction: a picture of the historical buildings in downtown Big Rapids. (Pioneer Photo)