

Profiles ◆ in ◆ Framing

Frame Masters Gallery

Business and pleasure *do* mix in this North Carolina shop.

by Anne Vazquez



Providing a diverse selection and continuing education have been focal points for Janet Berry over the past 25 years.

Excelling in both the creative and business side of a retail store is a challenge that most retail custom framers face. Janet Berry has been fortunate to have a background in both business and design. While earning a business degree, she was an aspiring artist who—as she explains it—eventually became a frustrated artist. After she discovered picture framing while working for a framer, Janet decided to parlay her creativity and knowledge of the arts into a business venture. In 1976, in Shelby, NC, she opened up her first shop, Best Picture Show. And

Owner:
Janet Berry, CPF

Location:
Shelby, NC

How Long In Business:
Nearly 26 years; six years at present location

How Many Employees:
Two full-time; two part-time

Square Footage:
3,500 total, divided evenly between showroom and production area

in December 2001, the Cleveland County Chamber of Commerce named Janet “Entrepreneur of the Year.” The annual award recognizes professionalism and effort to associates and clientele.

Beginning as a one-woman operation, Janet was continually building upon her knowledge of picture framing, and early on noted the importance of preservation. Six years into running her business, she earned the CPF designation, as she felt that it was necessary to gain credibility with her clients as well as to gain recognition among her peers.

Then about 11 years ago,



Custom framing samples intermingled with various gift items help to draw customer interest.



Owner Janet Berry (seen here with her Entrepreneur of the Year award) thoroughly enjoys her business, and has found customers to be responsive to the shop's emphasis on preservation quality framing.

Janet moved her shop from its original location to the historic uptown district of Shelby. The move was prompted by a community effort to reignite economic activity in the uptown area.

With the move, she decided to also change the name of her business. Not only would it complement the relocation, but she had found that the name could be unclear as to what services she offered. "Once, when I was ordering moulding from a supplier, the customer service rep asked what a video rental store does with picture frame moulding. I realized times had changed," explains Janet.

So Frame Masters Gallery was born. Janet brought with her the two full-time and one part-time employees that she had hired in the original location.

The move meant that Janet was doubling her shop space to 2,000 square feet. Yet, after several years, she needed more room, especially since she had begun to carry an array of gift items. When a fellow uptown business owner retired, she moved into that space and again expanded—this time to 3,500 square feet.

Preservation is an important focus for Janet. In the 1990's, she worked with the FACTS (Fine Art Care and Treatment Standards) to help establish its standards that were published in 1996. In her everyday operations, she focuses on preserving each piece that comes in to be framed. She says that while most jobs are framed preservationally, there are some customers who decline those methods. In that case, they are asked to sign a



The design counter (seen at left) is 16 feet long, allowing more than one designer to work there at a time.



With half of the shop's square footage allotted to production, the framers have a generous area for backroom operations.

waiver and the design proceeds.

Each piece that is preservation-framed has a sticker placed on the back, which lists the materials used. The sticker is also dated to remind the client when 10 years has passed. It's suggested they bring the piece back at that time for inspection.

Technology plays an important role at Frame Masters Gallery. About three years ago, Janet purchased a computerized mat cutter and installed point-of-sale software at the design counter.

Janet now has four staff members in her shop. There are two full-time employees—Myra Lackey who's been with the shop for 10 years, and Joel Hendrick who has been there for six years. There are also two part-timers—Myra Dixon, a 10-year veteran, and Shirley Poole who has worked at the shop for two years. As Janet relates the varied duties performed by each member of her staff, she stresses, "They are indeed an asset to the success of this business."

Janet encourages staff members to attend trade shows and industry education. For instance, when Myra Lackey was hired, she had moderate experience in picture framing. Through continued education, Myra is now the shop's needleart specialist. Janet also makes sure to continue her own framing education, usually attending classes on marketing and display. "It doesn't hurt to get a fresh idea. And even if you only leave with one new thing, it's worth it," she says.

Just as Janet puts emphasis on education for herself and her staff, she also recognizes the need to educate consumers whenever

possible. Janet and the staff take time at the design counter to show framing options and explain the features of each, such as why a certain glazing will protect the art or why a moulding looks best with the colors in the item being framed.

She sends out newsletters to inform customers about various aspects and possibilities of framing. Most recently, she's been working with other businesses to produce the newsletters. Presently, she's partnered with a children's dress shop, a ladies' dress shop, and a jewelry maker. By aligning herself with other high-end businesses, she has expanded her potential customer base.

Janet's uses an array of venues in her marketing and advertising efforts. In addition to advertising on the local television station, she runs ads in area newspapers. She acknowledges that it can be diffi-

cult to gauge response to the her ads. Therefore, she often includes text that tells potential customers to call to find out more. She also uses her website to provide general information about her business, as well as showcase the various artwork that can be purchased.

Over the years, Janet has seen many changes in the framing industry, as well fluctuations in the economy. When asked how periodic economic downturns have affected her business, she notes that while there was some decrease in business, it has not been significant.

Also, there's no lack of competition, with four framing businesses in a 20-mile radius. However, Frame Masters Gallery continues to thrive. Commenting on this, Janet explains, "We offer the best price for the fairest price that we can. We have built our business on reputation." ■



Joel's primary duties are to cut and join frames, as well as to cut glazing.