



Article 107

October 18, 2009

Artist hits homer with help of economic development network

By Monica Abeita, Regional Development Corporation for Northern New Mexico Connect

Jolene Jessie's life philosophy, and the mantra that has made her successful in business, is "find a need and meet it." In 1987, Jessie worked as a free-lance portrait artist in San Francisco and was asked to paint images of San Francisco Giants players on baseballs. "The Giants were my first clients," she said. "They bought dozens of those baseballs."

That's where Jessie's work in custom sports memorabilia began. Today, Jessie operates sportartist.com from her home in Chama, New Mexico. Her custom portraits are painted on jerseys, baseballs, bats, footballs and other collectibles. Jessie also has a successful business relationship with Upper Deck, the world's largest baseball card company, for whom she produces high-end signed memorabilia.

As a member of the Chama Valley Chamber of Commerce, Jessie in 2008 met Christopher Madrid of LINK, which offers coaching and networking to small businesses and entrepreneurs in Rio Arriba County. It is one of five services offered to Northern New Mexico businesses provided by Northern New Mexico Connect, the principal economic-development and investment arm of Los Alamos National Security LLC and Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL).

"Christopher and I began by brainstorming about my business, including potential growth, employees, legal structure, future partners, and other ideas," Jessie said. "He then began networking me with resources based on my business needs."

Madrid introduced Jessie to the team of Donna Berg and Grace Brill, who work for Northern New Mexico Connect's Market Intelligence initiative. Berg and Brill began advising Jessie about the possibility of working with an agent and exploring galleries in major metropolitan areas such as Las Vegas, New Orleans and Chicago.

"Galleries are a new market for my business," Jessie said. "For years, I focused on wholesale paintings to companies and providing special projects to high-end collectors. Market Intelligence opened my eyes to new possibilities."

The Market Intelligence team then told Jessie about another program that could help her — the master of business administration (MBA) Summer Internship Program at LANL. The MBA program matches scientists and entrepreneurs with MBA interns from colleges and universities

across the country. The interns help Northern New Mexico businesses address challenges to their business success.

This summer, Jessie was advised by interns Aaron Sauers of the University of Tennessee, Jacqueline Shen of Cornell University and Brandon McGirr of the University of Wisconsin. The final report from these interns offered an in-depth analysis of Sportsartist's market, as well as opportunities and suggestions for beneficial changes. "The report and our in-person meetings were inspiring," Jessie said, "and led me to rename my business to drive more customers to my Web site."

Through networking, Jessie said, one good thing has led to another. "I knew my business needed to grow," she said. "LINK, Market Intelligence, the MBA interns and the people I met though Northern New Mexico Connect gave me confidence and working knowledge to try new things."

Northern New Mexico Connect's "business team" approach provided Jessie with a solid foundation for her business. This approach recently helped her secure an agent and two large projects with a gallery and the MGM Grand Hotel in Las Vegas. "I believe the programs and the people involved truly give Northern New Mexico entrepreneurs like me vital assistance in a rural economy," Jessie said.

For more information about Northern New Mexico Connect programs, visit www./nnmconnect.net

Finance New Mexico is an initiative of the New Mexico Small Business Investment Corporation (NMSBIC) and its partners to assist individuals and businesses in obtaining skills and funding-resources for their business or idea. To learn more, go to www.FinanceNewMexico.org.

