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MAIN STREET



PBN PHOTO/STEPHANIE EWENS

JENNIFER BOGUTT, right, started Jenn Lee Design in 2003 after working in New York in design, advertising and marketing.

A young firm with New York flair

By David Ortiz,
PBN Staff Writer

The story of Jenn Lee Design Co., an East Greenwich-based advertising, marketing and public relations firm, is largely the story of the woman who founded the agency in 2003.

Jennifer Bogutt's young, spunky business offers a design look akin to work done by agencies in New York City and Boston, at Rhode Island prices. That's no surprise, since Bogutt spent the early part of her career in the trenches of New York's design world before returning to her native Rhode Island and eventually launching her own agency.

Bogutt, who grew up in Charlestown, spent most of the 1990s in Manhattan, first getting her undergraduate degree at the School of Visual Arts. After graduating, Bogutt freelanced for several years at numerous design and photography studios before taking a job in the creative department of a marketing company working in the music industry. She moved on from that job when she was recruited to do marketing and advertising for a dot.com company that eventually went public on the German stock exchange.

Bogutt returned to Rhode Island in 2001 to run the Interactive Medium Web Design program at Katharine Gibbs School, but her passion for design soon led her back into the industry as an entrepreneur.

While teaching at Katharine Gibbs, Bogutt began bringing Web development projects from local businesses and organizations into her classroom, offering students working on their final projects a glimpse of the type of work they would do at an agency.

The students apparently did too good a job under Bogutt's tutelage; businesses began asking her to continue doing Web development work for them.

"The clients kept a hold of me," she said, laughing. "They contacted me on the side as the students graduated and moved on and asked, can we do this? can we do that? And it was just really word of mouth started the company itself. I started doing it on a part-time basis and then ended up launching the company full time."

Bogutt gave her new agency her own name, and kept the name for the business after she got married in 2005 and gave up her maiden name, Lee.

Aside from lots of Web site development, much of Jenn Lee Design's early work involved designing post cards, tri-folds and other print advertising materials. But the agency quickly widened its range of services to include marketing and public relations, in an organic process that grew out of providing clients everything they needed, Bogutt said.

"We would sit down and come up with these ideas at brainstorming meetings, and then we'd execute them and say, 'Wait, this is marketing we're doing here for these people.' And, 'Hey, let's reach out to the editors and let them know.' OK, you know what? This is PR we're now doing for our clients," she said.

Such brainstorming meetings take place at Jenn Lee Design's offices inside a converted mill building in downtown East Greenwich, where Bogutt and her small team of full-time employees are joined on a daily basis by a members of a pool of about 12 programmers, Web developers, photographers, illustrators and other freelancers whom the agency employs for particular projects.

Bogutt said she strives to create a relaxed, warm environment where team members can form bonds and the creative juices can flow. On sunny days, light pours through the studio's floor-to-ceiling windows and onto its exposed brick walls. Bogutt recently became the proud guardian of a Springer spaniel puppy, and said she'll bring the dog to the office soon.

Jenn Lee Design also has a satellite office in Providence. In its early years, the agency has worked mostly with business and organizations in the hospitality industry, but Bogutt said she recently has begun pushing aggressively to do more business with manufacturers and health care companies and organizations. The advertising, marketing and public relations industry is very competitive in Rhode Island, Bogutt said, but she welcomes the competition, which she said forces her agency to maintain its commitment to its clients and reach new heights of creativity.

She is also been diligent about seeking strong relationships in the state's business community, which already has paid dividends; not long ago, Jenn Lee Design was chosen by the Greater Providence Chamber of Commerce as a Web development firm of choice in its advantage referral program. On Oct. 30, the agency will host an after-hours networking event for the combined Greater Providence and East Greenwich chambers.

“Our passion is our clients’ success,” Bogutt says. •