



Business Trends

Bamboo Shoots

Much has been inked about 34-year-old April Femrite, whose Mankato home-based business, Naturally Bamboo, made the final round in the Forbes.com Boost Your Business contest. Her fledgling business ships U.S.-made fabric rolls of bamboo to a Minneapolis sewing contractor, who then fashions stylish Naturally Bamboo clothing for sale. You can find her line in more than 20 retail outlets, ranging from a yoga studio in Hawaii to a Vancouver boutique.

In the beginning of the Forbes.com contest, she had to submit a 500-word business synopsis. Fifteen hundred others did the same. When Forbes whittled the contest to 20, Femrite had to submit a 30-second video. Chosen for the top five, she traveled to New York City to meet with six highbrow judges.

How did she try impressing the judges? In a *Connect Business Magazine* telephone interview, she said, "I'm a

clothing manufacturer trying to keep all aspects of my business domestic, from working with Mississippi farmers that grow bamboo to the processing, making the fabric, cut and sew operations, all the way to the headquarters in Minnesota. Ninety-five percent of apparel is made overseas. We're trying to have an environmentally responsible supply chain and make our apparel ethically. I'm also trying to create local paying jobs in a new economy."

Femrite works almost exclusively from her home—like so many trendy business owners nowadays—running nearly everything from a portable laptop. She said, "I'm a stay-at-home mom. My kids aren't in daycare because I want to be the primary caregiver. I work around their school schedules. Even so, I still work 50-60 hours a week. After they go to bed, I'm up until midnight. Most of my work involves being on the telephone and computer, so I don't often need to go anywhere. When driving to the Cities

once a week, sometimes I take along my 3-year-old."

A Mankato East and MSU graduate, Femrite envisions building a manufacturing plant in Mankato. Had she won the contest, she would have received \$100,000 in cash and advertising credits with Forbes. You can learn more about her by seeing the ad on p. 42.

The September 8 issue of *Home Business Magazine* reported the recession has significantly increased the number of home-based businesses. Some reasons for the trend: laid-off workers seeking income, better Internet access now available, disillusionment with Corporate America, a growing entrepreneurial spirit, corporate downsizing creating more outside contractors, and unstable economic conditions leading people to start part-time jobs on-the-side.

Canuck Bank

The Editor discovered a fascinating

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