

ARKANSAS BUSINESS

www.arkansasbusiness.com

Vol. 23, No. 16 • April 24-30, 2006 • 1 Dollar

OFFICE EQUIPMENT

Businesses Warming Up to Office Art

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MORE ARKANSAS BUSINESSES have become comfortable taking money out of their bank accounts and hanging it on their walls, artists and art dealers say. There must be millions of dollars' worth of corporate art in offices and other workspaces across the state.

Hospitals and large corporations, especially, have come to regard artwork as a standard expense of a new building project. But even small businesses are spending to spruce up their space.

There are plenty of sources, including art dealers, interior designers and online listing services — among them an Arkansas company that has become one of the most successful art stores in cyberspace.

Deciding what is good art ultimately lies in eyes of the beholder; however, many Arkansas businesses — particularly the smaller ones — try to support in-state artists. Budgeting for art has also become less arbitrary, as art dealers and interior designers have come up with suggested spending equations.

Office Adornments

Just as the diamond industry has come up with the handy rule of thumb that an engagement ring should cost a prospective groom two months of salary, some art dealers also use math to help businesses decide what they should spend on corporate art.

Greg Thompson, owner of Greg Thompson Fine Art in Little Rock, is among the state's busier corporate art dealers, and he typically tells clients that an appropriate art budget is about 1 percent to 2 percent of the cost of the building that will showcase the art.

"You know, when you buy a Cadillac, you want to put a nice CD player in it," Thompson said. "You don't want to put in an AM/FM radio."

Thompson has helped several Arkansas businesses plan, acquire and install art in their offices. He said there are basically two types of clients: those building a collection and those that know what they want and need help finding it. The majority of Thompson's corporate work is with the former, and those jobs usually occur when a new building is going up or a renovation is being done.

Crews & Associates' space in the First Security Building on President Clinton Avenue in Little Rock's River Market, Thompson said, was a perfect example. "They wanted to add that class and a certain cachet to the inside of the new building," Thompson said.

Crews & Associates preferred modern artwork that mirrored the new building's modern interior. Thompson's Web site describes the art used: "Regional and national artists were used to convey a sense of the modern sensibility and forward thinking of this firm in their reception area."

Thompson also helped Little Rock's Axiom Corp. settle into its River Market digs, the \$25 million headquarters built in 2002, by commissioning regional artists whose work would complement the building's clean lines and pieces that "convey a sense of the power of technology as the catalyst for capitalizing on the possibilities for the future."

Thompson has also done work for Cooper Realty Investments Inc.'s Little



PHOTOGRAPHS PROVIDED

FINE ART FINDS: Little Rock art dealer Greg Thompson has helped put together a collection for Philander Smith College that includes works by Tarrence Corbin and A.J. Smith, top, and Sam Gilliam, bottom right, and at UAMS' Institute on Aging a sculpture by Judy Dioszegi, bottom left.

Rock office, Metropolitan National Bank's executive floor in the 40-story building downtown, Morgan Stanley Dean Witter's Little Rock office and the University of Arkansas System headquarters in Little Rock, among other corporate, education, government, health care and residential projects.

Perhaps one of his largest and most visible projects was at the Donald W. Reynolds Center on Aging at the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences in Little Rock.

Local Art Lovers

The Center on Aging is a good example of a facility whose art cost between 1 and 2 percent of the building cost. The Donald W. Reynolds Foundation in Las Vegas put up \$18.4 million for the building, but it was up to UAMS and its donors to decorate the place with art.

That task was left to Thompson and Judy Snowden, who was on the Institute on Aging's board in May 2000 when she was given just a few months to put together the building's art collection.

With about \$300,000 in donations from 12 donors — Cooper Communities Inc. was by far the largest — Thompson and Snowden were able to put together a collection of 41 pieces by many of Arkansas' most renowned artists. Works by Al Allen, Alice Andrews, James Hays, Henri Linton, Townsend Wolfe, George Dombek and

others are part of the collection that has since grown to include more than 50 pieces.

Snowden described the importance of quality art in the health care facility.

"I thought it should be used somewhat as a distracter to take their mind away from their self and to make them return to a pleasurable memory bank within their head," she said.

Not only did Snowden and Thompson consider the quality of the art for the collection but also its origins. All of the works came from Arkansas artists. It's an approach many businesses take when purchasing corporate art.

When United Holding Co. in Springdale finished building its two-story offices about three years ago, some employees and an interior design consultant zeroed in on local painters at a Fayetteville gallery and purchased several originals, including an abstract painting by Fayetteville artist Milan Jilka titled "9."

The acrylic painting entails a series of nine 11-by-72-inch boards mounted on a curved wall. Because the work was done on separate boards, it was a perfect fit for the wall. Young said the consultant knew of the painting and helped facilitate the purchase.

United Holding ended up spending between \$30,000 and \$35,000 on paintings in its common areas, a budget that could have easily shrunk if construction on the building had cost overruns.

Young said the art was worth it. From

an aesthetic standpoint, it makes the offices look nice, he said. Plus, it supported local artists.

Most businesses don't purchase original artwork. Instead, they buy giclees.

A giclee (pronounced ZHEE-clay) is a high-resolution reproduction printed from a digital file onto one of a variety of surfaces, such as canvas, with archival quality inks. The prints are of a better quality than four-color poster reproductions and generally cost about one-tenth the price of an original.

Arvest Bank in Fayetteville recently moved its private banking office from downtown to Millsap Road. Kelly Sutterfield, manager of the bank group's architectural division, and Angy Lyons, interior designer and purchasing agent for the division, said the private banking office required décor more upscale than the typical Arvest branch.

The team chose to use Dombek's art throughout the office. Since an original Dombek painting can command \$24,000, Arvest used giclees purchased through J. Gallery in Fayetteville.

"It can accentuate an area," Lyons said. "It's culturally enriching to the environment."

Another bank, Little Rock's Bank of the Ozarks, also uses in-state talent to decorate its locations with photographic images specific to each branch's community. For example, the bank's Jasper office features pictures of the Buffalo River and nearby bluffs. And its Little Rock headquarters highlights some of the city's architectural elements at well-known landmarks, such as Little Rock Central High School and the Little Rock National Airport.

Photographer James P. Bell takes the images, which are blown up to 28 inches by 30 inches, matted and framed.

Susan Blair, executive vice president of Bank of the Ozarks, said the art "underscores the importance of local communities and reinforces that we are a community bank."

And while many businesses hope their art entices or at least impresses the public, still others prefer to keep their treasures private. Stephens Inc., for example, is believed by many in the art world to have one of the best corporate art collections in the state. The company, however, declined requests to discuss it.

Worth Sparkman contributed to this report.