

# PPFA CONNECT

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## 'Small Business Warriors'

*Minnesota couple owns a successful frame shop and two design centers*



In 2001, with their children off to college, Valerie Becker and her husband John decided on a career shift. "We started searching for an occupation that would feed our creative soul, something that had been lacking in our previous careers," Valerie says. "I took a week-long custom framing class, and I was hooked." The following year, the couple opened their first shop in Red Wing, Minn., a small town on the Mississippi River about an hour south of the Twin Cities. "John's parents had retired in Red Wing, and we were happy to be near them," Valerie says. And so Red Wing Framing & Fine Art Printing was born—the start of what she and John call "a long and strange trip." "We are small business warriors and we are proud to have powered through some of the biggest challenges small businesses have ever faced," the couple posted on their Facebook page.

With a focus on custom framing along with digital fine art printing, the shop also has a wonderful art gallery space that hosts many events centered around art and the Becker's personal interests.

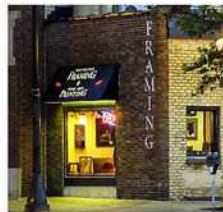
The Becker's goal has been to expand beyond Red Wing and add locations to provide their expertise to Southeastern Minnesota. With that in mind, they opened a design center in Rochester, Minn., in 2014; and last summer opened a design center in Northfield, Minn. The stores are about 45-50 miles from one another, providing a strong customer base in each area. "But people often like the idea of dropping off their projects in one location and taking a beautiful drive to pick up in another location," Valerie says. "Each store is unique to its location, but we carry our tradition of strong customer service through to each one," she adds. "We enjoy giving back to each community in areas that reflect our interests including children and dogs."

"We've had some very interesting and diverse projects come through the doors, and that's part of the delight. Every project is unique and can bring its own challenges. Our customer base includes commercial as well as retail. Because we can print large, we've also figured out how to frame large. "We're humbled to have framed some very historic pieces from the Civil War including a musket and sword and several historic pieces for the Prairie Island Indian Community."



Clare Polencheck, who earned her CPF designation last year, is production manager in the Red Wing shop. "We're very proud of her accomplishments and she is truly a part of our family," Valerie says. "Our staff also includes Ricki Audiss, who brings a wonderfully upbeat style to our framing family. And Pi, our shop dog is often seen in one of the shops, and loves saying hello to everyone." John Becker has pursued the creative economy in other ways, and currently serves on the board of the Southeastern Minnesota Arts Council. "Wherever he travels, he always finds the local framer and stops in to say hello," Valerie says. Along the way, Valerie studied for the Certified Picture Framers certification.

"It was always important to us that we focus on archival framing, and use the best techniques possible to protect the art we were framing," she says. "We used this concept in our printing as well, using UV inks in our printers to provide quality prints that would last for many years. Many of our fine art printing customers are artists that are reproducing their originals." It was a logical step to go for the Master Certified Picture Framers certification, and Becker was grateful to receive the **Vivian Kistler MCPFF Scholarship**, which included a sitting for the exam and a stipend for costs associated with the exam. "Having the MCPFF has really elevated our business and shown our customers that we take our profession very seriously," she says.



Over the years, the Beckers, who are long time PPFA members, have invested in as many educational opportunities as possible, including the annual PPFA Convention and the West Coast Art and Frame Expo/National Conference in Las Vegas.

Valerie spent several years as treasurer of the North Central PPFA Chapter; and also travelled to Wisconsin, Michigan, Georgia and Kentucky for PPFA Chapter events.

She is the current chair of the PPFA Competition Board; and she and her board members are gearing up for the Finals of the PPFA International Framing Competition at PPFA 2020, and looking forward to the competition, and other events and classes, in Vegas at the end of this month - including the "Framing Competition

Experience" session, "Judges Qualification Course," and annual judges meeting.

The Competition Board will also have the exciting new 3-D PRINT piece, "Devoted Thoughts About Dogs," for attendees to purchase at the PPFA booth or Sunday evening reception.

"In the years we've been PPFA members, the organization has had its ups and downs—but I'm especially excited to be a part of it at this time because the possibilities for growth within the organization are real and happening," Valerie says.

"The fact is that PPFA believes strongly in education, certification and competition. I've been on the competition board for the last three years and it's been a fantastic opportunity to connect and work with framers from all over the world.

"The competition is a great learning experience for framers, and the level of expertise we see is truly inspiring."



From the top: Pi, the shop dog, enjoys welcoming customers; Red Wing Framing in Red Wing, Minn., opened in 2002; (l-r) Ricki Audiss, Valerie Becker, MCPF, and Clare Polencheck, CPF; one of the many beautiful projects created by the Red Wing team; and the locations in Rochester and Northfield, Minn.