

# A creative couple of designers

**RISING STAR:** MARK AND JILL WISZ

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Mark and Jill Wisz never worry about commuting to work.

All it takes is a short stroll down their cobblestone driveway and they are at their graphic design company. OtherWisz Creative Corp. is located in a renovated two-story barn in the couple's backyard at 252 Lexington Ave.

A blacksmith owned the barn around 1885 and it has also been the unofficial venue for band practice in more recent years. Mark said when they first bought the house, bands would

still come by thinking they could play blaring rock music into the night.

The couple haven't always been business partners and their story is not typical of most entrepreneurs. Jill, the company's president, has a background in architecture and design and Mark, who serves as vice president and head designer, has worked in graphic design for more than 20 years. They founded the company in 2000, after some bad luck when three of Mark's employ-



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## WISZ: Services include Web site design, brochures

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ers went out of business.

Tired of depending on others, Mark decided it was time to go out on his own. And as Jill's role in the company increased, the collaboration seemed to work well.

"We thought long and hard about what we wanted to do," Jill said. "We really wanted to focus on the creativity that we have between us in terms of how we work."

They do everything from Web site design to brochures to logos and business cards - anything needed in a company's marketing strategy. Including Mark and Jill, there is one other graphic designer and they also subcontract work with several other freelance designers. There were few start-up costs - they already had the location and equipment.

Since the beginning, the company has had a continuous stream of clients and no dry spells. And on top of having two young daughters, the couple has been very busy. In the first few years, the business thrived on working with small start-ups, which is still an important aspect of their business.

One of their smaller clients, K Sisters Authentic Pierogi, has benefited from the unique design of its business cards. The cards are shaped like pierogis, which Jill said has helped the company because a lot of customers put them on their refrigerators.

Helping small businesses succeed is one of the most rewarding aspects of the business, Mark said. All the projects are custom, so there is no flat rate for their services and rates vary widely. They typically sit down with clients and assess exactly what they need and then develop a proposal. For example, they don't have templates for Web sites; everything is uniquely drawn up.

OtherWisz has also benefited from businesses placing a greater emphasis on brand identity in the last few years.

"Because the word 'brand' was such a buzz word a couple years back," Mark said, "I think people have started to think more about their aesthetic image."

Recently, the business has started working more with larger companies on in-



Mark and Jill Wisz operate their graphic design company, OtherWisz Creative Corporation, from a renovated two-story barn behind their home.

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depth projects.

For example, Independent Nursing Care in West Falls has contracted them to design their Web site, marketing material and trade show graphics. They have served more than 75 clients to date, including the Buffalo Sabres in 2000-2001, Niagara University and Fowler's Chocolates.

The business has grown slowly and consistently, but revenues have increased more sharply in the past two years. According to Jill, revenues were up in 2007 26 percent from the previous year. This year, revenues are on track to increase 36 percent.

The direction of the business is largely shaped by what's happening in the family. In the fall, both of their daughters will be in school for the first time, which Jill said will allow her to take a more aggressive approach in growing the company.

"We've been planning it for the last year how the company is going to change," Jill said, "it's what you do when you want to make family a large part of your life."