

By Stephanie Hintz

Rookie to Pro

Paradise City Arts Festivals is the art and crafts show "ace"

For over two decades, Paradise City Arts Festivals have been producing award-winning shows focused on contemporary craft and fine art. Founded by two artists who had already spent 20 years on the show circuit, their vision to create a world-class arts festival came to fruition with hard work, dedication, and by laying a solid foundation on which artists could effectively build up their brand — and their customers.

Handmade Business takes a moment to share their 20-year celebration, and explore the inner workings of an art and craft show legacy with Paradise City Arts Festival co-founder Linda Post.

"In this digital age, dominated by the production of objects without the touch of human hands, American craft makers have actually formed the cutting edge of a new movement," said Post. "The younger generation, jaded by cookie-cutter products, has embraced artisanal products like no other generation since the 1960s. I hope that we can guide Millennials to see the intrinsic value in owning original fine and functional art by Paradise City's artists."

Handmade Business (HB): Linda, alongside Geoffrey Post, you founded the Paradise City Arts Festival 21 years ago. What did you do in your twentieth year to commemorate that notable tenure in the arts and crafts world?

Linda Post (LP): "There has always been a very personal connection between the "family" of Paradise City artists, loyal patrons, and our wonderful staff. That is really what we were celebrating, and appropriately enough, our special theme that fall was "Face-to-Face," an exhibition that explored portraits — the most interactive and personal of art forms. We also highlighted our original "founding exhibitors" who joined us at Paradise City in the very first years, because we couldn't have accomplished this without them."

"Twenty years is truly a milestone in any career, and especially in one as volatile and unpredictable as the arts. 2014 also marked our fortieth year making a full-time living in the arts — we began participating in craft fairs as exhibitors in 1974, when this industry was in its infancy. Many of our friends, collectors, and fellow artists from those early days were among the first exhibitors and patrons at the Paradise City Arts Festival. Our original staff was made up of family and people we had worked with as artists over the years."



HB: What were the deciding factors in establishing the festival, the Paradise City Membership program, and the Paradise City Guide?

LP: "After twenty years as artists, we decided to put our years of practice and observations to work in a new career. We wanted to put together an event that was different, that combined the beauty and quality of a high-end indoor show with the best parts of an art festival — great food, live music, and outdoor sculpture spaces. We wanted it to be beautiful, festive, and fun, and an event that would appeal to a broad audience without sacrificing excellence. We also aimed to provide a marketing platform for artists and craft makers that would give them more publicity for their work and a consistent source of income and new customers."

"The Paradise City Membership Program grew out of the artists' need for even more marketing and business opportunities. Founded in 2006, it was actually the brainchild of our third partner, Geoffrey's brother Mark, who has an extensive background in the business world and technology. About half of the participants in our shows are now active artist members who benefit greatly from the marketing, promotional, automation, and day-to-day paperwork facilitation that this very popu-



lar program provides. The marketing aspect of membership has also increased these artists' at-show sales by substantial amounts, and led to connections with patrons and galleries outside of the shows. There are more member benefits added all the time."

"The *Paradise City Guide*, a glossy full-size magazine that is direct-mailed to more than 60,000 subscriber households twice yearly and distributed at Paradise City Arts Festivals, has developed a life of its own. We always produced a color program with exhibitor lists and editorial features for each event. In our sixth year, the program went from playbill size to magazine size. In 2004 we decided that the *Paradise City Guide* told our story in much more detail than the brochures we were sending to our extensive mailing list, and it would be a better promotional tool if people received it before the shows. The artists who are featured or advertise in the magazine often make sales before and after the shows because the Paradise City Guide is direct-mailed into homes."

HB: Tell us one interesting fact about you that your exhibitors/customers might not know.

LP: "Geoff and I are serious collectors ourselves, so we usually spend the quiet hours before opening walking the show and contemplating purchases from our artists."

HB: What life accomplishment are you most proud of, and why?

LP: "Well, Paradise City is my baby. Everyone is most proud of their children! I feel blessed by all the wonderful friends I've made in this business over the years and all the connections that have come my way. I am also so lucky for my partner in life and work, Geoffrey. We bring diverse talents and strengths to Paradise City, and I believe that the success of this business comes from a creative merging of different viewpoints, styles, and ideas."

HB: You mentioned earlier that you are also an artist. What is your medium and how do you weave those interests into your busy lifestyle today?

LP: "I am a painter. I mostly work on large-scale figurative paintings in my studio when I'm not working at Paradise City. Some of my recent work can be seen on my website www.LHPost.com,

which also hosts a blog about my work process. Geoffrey's creative outlet now is landscape gardening and stonework. There's much less time in my studio — Paradise City, with four events and two magazines to produce annually, is a pretty full-time job. But one of my favorite parts of directing Paradise City is my role as mentor to up-and-coming artists just starting to exhibit in our shows. I taught pastels, printmaking, and figure drawing for many years, so I guess it's a continuation of that part of my life."

"We both look at art and design all the time, whether it's in our travels, online, in periodicals, or galleries. Between the two of us, we have a great deal of practical knowledge and experience in many art and craft mediums: fiber, ceramics, sculpture, leather, photography, printmaking, painting — all of which is very advantageous in curating beautiful shows."

HB: What future plans are in store for Paradise City?

LP: "We do try to keep things fresh, so there will be some exciting changes in the layout of the Northampton show beginning in 2017. Whenever we change anything, the first question we always ask is 'how will this affect the exhibitors?'"

HB: Why should Handmade Business readers choose Paradise City Arts Festivals?

LP: "Our lives as artists laid the foundation for the guiding principles of Paradise City: respect artists in all ways possible, make shows easy, fun and profitable, and help artists reach an ever-growing audience both at shows and beyond. We're always personally accessible, walking the floors and grounds at the shows, giving advice and support where needed, greeting new artists, and welcoming back the returning exhibitors. Paradise City has a policy of encouraging, promoting, and mentoring emerging artists, and we always look at new applications with an open mind."

"Paradise City has an incredibly easy online application now. You can even use your website for the jury process, instead of submitting five images. The next application deadline is Sept. 8, 2016 for the Spring 2017 Paradise City Arts Festivals." ^{HB}

For more information, visit festivals.paradisecityarts.com.