



ENERGIZING ENTREPRENEURIAL COMMUNITIES

A Pathway to Prosperity



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Wyoming County artist takes the leap to start a business,

by Terry Bartley, Wyoming County Community Coach, The Hub

Making the transition from hobby to business is always a challenge for new entrepreneurs. Wyoming County artist, Laura Burdette, said she has found it particularly challenging in the mountain state.

“I’ve had to do side jobs because in West Virginia the term starving artist really applied,” Burdette said. “It’s hard to make a living completely on that but, if it’s in your heart and it’s what you really want to do, it has to come out.”

Burdette said she has been painting since she was old enough to hold a brush. Coming from a family of five children, Burdette and two of her sisters were artists. She can remember that they used to create calendars as Christmas presents rather than buying something. For Burdette, becoming a full-time artist is a long-time dream.

“When I was a little girl, I’d said, ‘Lord, when I grow up, please let me be an artist.’ That was exactly my prayer, so yeah pretty much that’s always what I wanted to do,” Burdette said.



While she has always had a passion for art, Burdette has not been in a position to make a career out of art for many years. She felt like there was a lack of opportunity in Southern West Virginia. However, she believes that building relationships within her community over the years is much of what makes her a successful artist today.

“It’s been kind of interesting because I was a waitress for almost 30 years,” Burdette said, “So during that time, I’ve established a clientele. I’ve handed out my cards and it’s just now that I’m painting full-time. I’ve got all of those [contacts] and it gives me more confidence to pursue it.”

Burdette sold her first piece of art in 1997. She said she believes this event is what has given her the motivation to continue to paint as a side job, paving the way for her recent jump to full-time artist.

“It was a sketch of Father Time. When I worked at the Eden Lounge, I would sit there and doodle. And [a customer] would ask me ‘what are you doing? what are you doing?’ and so he wanted a picture of Father Time,” Burdette said, “I did it and then after that I met his uncle and it looked like his uncle. So the next day, after I sold it to him, I came home and there was an easel, paint, paint brushes and canvases at my door. That man really got me started, it kind of gave me more confidence to say, ‘Hey, I can do this!’”

Burdette credits her transition to full-time artist to support from the West Virginia Community Development Hub and the Wyoming County Economic Development Authority (EDA). Through The Hub’s Innovation Acceleration Strategy program – the initiative that preceded The Hub’s [Energizing Entrepreneurial Communities](#) program – a volunteer arts team helped Burdette organize a series of art classes. A mini-grant allowed them to purchase start-up supplies.

“I wouldn’t be able to do what I’m doing if it wasn’t for the EDA and the West Virginia Community Development Hub. I would just of been painting in my studio, but I wouldn’t be able to do the instruction,” Burdette said, “It helps the community, I feel like it it helps people get excited and friends tell their friends and their friends tell their friends. This wouldn’t happen if it wasn’t for the mini-grant from The Hub.”

Burdette has since strengthened her classes through an ongoing partnership with the Wyoming County Family Resource Network. They manage the Students Against Destructive Decisions (SADD) Powerhouses in Pineville and Oceana, where Burdette holds her classes.

“[The Wyoming County Family Resource Network] is very helpful. When I feel like I’m starting to get lazy or overwhelmed with other things, they say, ‘When do you want to do another class?’ They don’t charge anything and there actually are a few people that work at the PowerHouse that have become students of mine. So they encouraged the community to come in and actually I think there was a couple of girls that they did scholarships for, they paid their way so they can take the classes,” Burdette said.

Burdette said she enjoys the class because she appreciates the chance to pass on her passion and her lessons learned to her students. She said she hopes they can see how her commitment to art has created her opportunity to live her dream.

“Well I tell my students, especially the younger ones, don’t get distracted. Don’t let peers and don’t let people drag you off if it’s your passion. Right now I have a little girl that is really pursuing it and she’s taking it seriously, so just don’t get distracted. Don’t stop doing it and you’ll be successful,” Burdette said.

If you know someone in Wyoming County that would enjoy taking an art class or would like to acquire a custom piece of art from Laura Burdette, she can be reached at her [studio page on Facebook](#).

