



community development partnership

Creating opportunities for people to live, work, and thrive on the Lower Cape

Nick Nickerson: Fisherman Turned Artist

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Nick Nickerson
Owner, Chatham Coastal Creations



Part of what makes the Lower and Outer Cape unique is its diverse small business community. From restaurants and retail to local artists, the Community Development Partnership is committed to helping these businesses thrive.

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, it disproportionately affected small businesses and many turned to the CDP for assistance, including local fisherman turned artist Nick Nickerson.

Nick spent the majority of his life working as a commercial fisherman. In 2009, he was diagnosed with cancer and had to put his career on hold while receiving treatment. Needing a new hobby to relax and pass the time while recovering, Nick thought back to his days as a scalloper. “We would shuck them at sea and just toss the shells overboard,” he recalls.

Nick started asking his fishing friends to bring the shells to him, rather than discarding them into the ocean. He cleaned and smoothed out the shells in his backyard workshop and began to explore what he could create with them. He tried different projects to pass the time, including decorative wreaths. A friend asked him to use one of his wreaths to frame a mirror.

Liking the way that looked, Nick shifted his focus to perfecting his mirror frames. Not long after, he started receiving offers to hang his work in local art galleries. Interest in his product grew from the exposure and Chatham Coastal Creations was born.

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As his mirrors became increasingly popular, Nick began to brainstorm new scallop shell creations. Inspired by his son-in-law, who carves custom designs in wooden breadboards, he decided to try cutting designs into the shells to make ornaments. He began to experiment using his son-in-law's equipment but soon realized this approach was impractical. It was imprecise and labor intensive.

Not one to be deterred, Nick began to research other methods that were precise and could be replicated quickly. He found five companies in Massachusetts that did precision water jet cutting, before partnering with the Hersey Clutch Company in Orleans. "You'd think I would have thought I would have gone to the local place first," he jokes.

Nick and Hersey Clutch worked together to develop a program to create nine different designs. The next year that increased to eighteen designs, and now they have 67. The ornaments took off and by 2020 were stocked in over 70 stores, reaching customers as far as New Jersey. "They were popular at local craft fairs, and I went on the road to promote them before the pandemic," he says.

When the COVID-19 pandemic began to spread and impact the local economy, many of the businesses that sold Nick's products were not essential and had to shut down. When they reopened many saw sharp decreases in their business. With an entrepreneurial spirit, Nick pivoted to marketing his creations on-line, selling directly to consumers through [his website](#). The economic fallout from the pandemic however, proved to be long lasting. "There was a long period when I was getting almost no orders," recalls Nick.

Nick learned about the CDP's Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Program from a staff member at the Harwich Cultural Center, where he has a studio. For several years the CDP has partnered with the Cultural Center to provide programs and workshops specifically targeting local artists and participates in Art Week.

Through the CDBG program, qualified small businesses affected by the COVID-19 pandemic could receive up to \$10,000 in forgivable loans to help mitigate the economic fallout. Nick quickly reached out to Pam Andersen, the CDP's Director of Business & Credit Programs, to apply for the program. "She was very helpful," says Nick, "I'm not very computer literate, and she helped walk me through the process to get the application done." With Pam's assistance, Nick was able to secure a \$10,000 forgivable loan to help manage expenses as sales declined.

Despite the difficulties of the past year, Nick is optimistic about the future. He is confident in his product and hopes with a busy summer projected he will see his sales begin to increase again. "It's a well-made local product," he says, "and I think people really like that."

To date the CDP has distributed nearly \$400,000 in CDBG forgivable loans to 39 local businesses and remains committed to helping small businesses like Nick's recover from the economic downturn of the past year.