



community development partnership

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

Where Are They Now?...When Growing Pains are Good

“It is definitely a balance of streamlining, maintaining that personal touch and keeping our heart and soul in it.”

Lizzy Escher, co-owner ARTichoke



When sisters and Brewster natives Kate and Lizzy Escher embarked on their silk-screening business, they considered it a hobby. They were living in Boston at the time and created their screened apparel out of Lizzy's bedroom. Although their fledgling business, ARTichoke, largely used the web-based Etsy to market their unique clothing, the business grew and production expanded into Kate's kitchen.

After moving back to Cape Cod and setting up shop in their landlord's basement, the sisters became more serious and finally decided “Let's make this a lifestyle!” recalls Lizzy. They wanted a store in Orleans but they weren't ready financially. So they purchased a mobile truck and began working craft fairs and flea markets.

Around this time a friend told them about the CDP, remarking “they are great and they want to work with small businesses.” Lizzy remembers that “The CDP gave us the guidance to get us moving in the right direction.” What stands out for Lizzy is that “with the CDP, we never felt stupid. We left feeling like ok, we know what we need to do today!” And with that, the Escher sisters moved their production to a studio, growing their business through craft fairs.

ARTichoke was ready for the big leap and the Eschers leased a building on Route 6 in Eastham that provided them with both a storefront and studio space. “It was a real risk,” recalls Lizzy. “It was all funded with credit cards.” But now they were ready to start wholesaling.

The Eschers had their sights on a trade show in Las Vegas, but they needed a way to stand out with professional marketing materials. “Marketing is a big part of your business and it has to be on point,” says Lizzy, and what they needed was an industry tool called a look book. “We have a small

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handmade collection and we were going against all the big designers,” recalls Lizzy. They once again reached out to the CDP and qualified for a small professional services grant to pay for a photographer and graphic designer. “That was huge,” recalls Lizzy. “That look book brought us up to the same level as the other designers.”

In fact they received many compliments at the Las Vegas Trade Show and managed to pick up orders from 9 new accounts that “would not have been possible without the collateral marketing material,” says Lizzy.

Their partnership with the CDP continues. They have taken a QuickBooks class and reached out numerous times for input. “I never feel stupid about going to the CDP and asking any question,” says Lizzy. “No matter the idea, no matter how big or small, there are no judgments.”

Business continues to grow. The store contains a robust retail area, filled with unique ARTichoke designs, as well as numerous gift items, all created by small shop artisans. Every piece of apparel is still designed and screened in house, in a room at the back of the store.

ARTichoke’s big challenge now is handling the variety of human resource needs that come with growth. Lizzy says she feels the need for a manager but recognizes how important it is to find the right fit. “It is definitely a balance of streamlining, maintaining that personal touch and keeping our heart and soul in it.” Production poses another challenge. “We struggle to keep up with production.” While ARTichoke will be hiring to fill those needs for the upcoming season, “It takes a while to train because you have to be fast,” notes Lizzy. “We are in the midst of growing pains. But knowing the CDP is there and we can ask questions without being judged is huge.”

Despite the challenges, ARTichoke is immensely fulfilling to the Escher sisters. “I never get tired of coming to work,” says Lizzy. “I am always jazzed.”