

March 12, 2015

David Hurwitz, 23 Randolph Ave., Randolph, Vermont 05060, 802-728-9399

To member of the House Appropriations Committee:

I have been a member of the Guild of Vermont Furniture Makers for the past eight years, and I have been doing woodworking professionally for the past 27 years (self-employed for 22 years). The Guild's primary focus has been collective marketing for our members throughout the state. We received a Working Lands grant two years ago for \$10,000, which we matched and then used part of it to hire Burlington Bytes (in Burlington) to update our website to make it capable of better search engine optimization. That was a critical upgrade, and I, like many other Guild members, have seen a major positive impact in the form of increased inquiries about my work that I have been receiving from the Guild website. Several of those inquiries have resulted in new sales, at least three in 2014 that I can attribute to the site.

We also used a portion of the funds to hire Kate Pace of Route Seven Social in Manchester, VT. Kate is a master of social media marketing, and has generated increased traffic to our website and social media platforms. She has also been instrumental in guiding our plans for future marketing projects. We have decided to keep her on once our Working Lands grant runs out.

The Working Lands grant has made it possible for our Guild to go to the next level in terms of our marketing and visibility, and we are seeing the results. The web and e-commerce is more and more becoming the absolute dominant and most effective mode of marketing and selling our handmade furniture. As the technology of computers, digital photography and online connection speeds has improved, it has allowed us to reach a national and global base of customers. That has been a game changer, and it has helped many of us weather the recession a lot easier. **And that is why more needs to be done in this state to bring real broadband service to all areas of the state.** E-commerce is critical to any small business trying to sell online in rural Vermont, and it can help bring more dollars into the state in the form of sales, and more income tax revenue as a result.

Most of my customers are out of state. When they purchase my work, I keep the money local by supporting local businesses. I buy most of my lumber from saw mills in Bristol, and when I have to crate pieces to ship, I buy the crating materials from Central Supplies in Randolph. I recently had my website completely redesigned and rebuilt from the ground up. I hired a web designer based in Brattleboro to do the work.

While the Guild is not asking for more money from the Working Lands granting process, I feel it is critical to continue the Working Lands Enterprise Fund at full funding levels, in order to give other ag and forest products companies a leg up to become more profitable, and thereby bring more tax revenue into the state and support local suppliers. I am involved with the Vermont Woodworking School in Fairfax (teach there occasionally), and I know that there are many young people who have gone through that program who want to stay in Vermont, but face the major challenges of starting a new woodworking business. The Working Lands funding program

could help these talented young people. The Vermont forest products industry is a mostly graying population - we need to support and encourage young people who are excited about entering this field. And by entering this field, it helps preserve our working lands as working lands, instead of being decimated by other forms of development.

The recession caused a major crisis in the forest products sector in Vermont. So many saw mills went out of business that Canadian saw mills have now stepped in and are buying up much of the logs in VT and hauling them north to mills in Quebec. Every time I drive on 89, I see numerous log trucks heading north to the border. Of the few Vermont mills and loggers that are left, they need our support, and the Working Lands funding can play a critical role in their survival. Why ship our precious forest resources to Canada when we could be adding value to them, and creating jobs with them right here in Vermont, by turning more of them into wood products?

And in broader terms, regarding our "Working Lands", particularly our agricultural lands, I think it is high time the legislature legalized industrial hemp and marijuana in Vermont. Instead of axing all these different and very important programs in the budget, these budget problems could be solved more easily with tax revenues from legalized marijuana sales. People are growing and buying it anyway, and the state's and fed's efforts to stop it are ineffective and a tremendous waste of money. The longer the state delays legalization, the more it misses the boat and misses the chance to balance budgets in a less painful and more reasonable way.

Thank you for the opportunity to share my thoughts and experience as a recipient of the Working Lands funding. Please feel free to contact me with any questions you may have.

Best regards,

David Hurwitz
David Hurwitz Originals
Unique, handcrafted woodwork and design
23 Randolph Ave.
Randolph, Vermont 05060
phone: 802-728-9399
website: www.DavidHurwitzOriginals.com