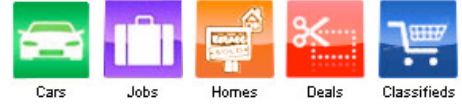


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## Weaving a Penn State education in Penndel

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By Dan Perez  
Staff Writer |

A Bucks County business, a Penn State graduate and an internationally known artist are teaming up to help students facing tough times.

The first tapestry in a limited-edition fundraising project came to life row by row Friday on a Langhorne Carpet Co. loom that dates to the 1940s.

“Hand in Hand” is the name of the piece, which is made out of 100-percent natural wool. It features two pale blue hands with intertwined fingers on a bright red background edged in purple. Each tapestry measures 24 inches by 36 inches and contains more than 2,000 yards of yarn and 80,000 individual stitches.

The collaboration among the Bucks County business, the Penn State alumnus and a graphic design artist utilized the factory’s loom, the alumnus’ idea and the artist’s inspiration.

The Penn Stater, Tom Sharbaugh, an attorney who practices in Philadelphia, and his wife came up with the idea for the student loan project, which is designed to help Penn State students facing financial hardships to finish their degrees. The program, called the Microfinance Match, has raised about \$150,000.

“I began reading about micro-finance programs through which a nonprofit organization made small loans to needy borrowers, often in underdeveloped countries, and the funds repaid by the borrowers provided an ongoing fund from which future loans could be made on the same basis,” Sharbaugh explained. “This was my motivation for applying the program towards Penn State students in need.”

The project will offer lower interest rates than conventional student loans and will be administered through the school’s office of student aid, he said.

Sharbaugh needed a way to raise money for the program, so his friend and former Penn State classmate, Steph Rosenfeld, got the idea of selling tapestries as a fundraiser. Rosenfeld had previously worked with the Langhorne Carpet Co. on several projects, including one to raise money for Habitat for Humanity.

The two Penn State graduates contacted Lanny Sommese, a well-known graphic design artist and the head of Penn State’s graphic design program, who agreed to create the design for the tapestry.

"The interwoven hands on the piece not only represent the process of weaving the tapestry but also the unique and interpersonal relationship between the people contributing and the people receiving the scholarship," Sommese said.

As for Sharbaugh, "the opportunity to work with one of the oldest factories still being used in Pennsylvania added another positive element to this project."

The Langhorne Carpet Co., which dates to 1930, is a labyrinthian 56,000-square-foot factory that sits at the corner of Penndel's West Lincoln Highway and Hulmeville Avenue. President Bill Morrow said it was opened by his great-grandfather.

The business is no stranger to charity collaborations.

Through an initiative called "Carpets of Caring" that Morrow runs, the company provides its services to weave special projects for noble causes. In 2001, shortly after the events of Sept. 11, the company created a special rug with an American flag crafted into it and donated the proceeds to the September 11 memorial fund for the New York City Fire Department.

"It's great to take on a project like this," Morrow said. "We're able to be part of a good cause and get our name out there for people to see."

Advertising is important to the company because of the economy and competition from overseas, he said.

"Our major competition is from China," he said. "It's (making carpet) still a labor-intensive industry and there's a demand for the high-quality product that we make locally."

For the Hand in Hand Penn State project, 772 pattern cards were needed for each limited edition rug. Each pattern card is about the size of a piece of copy paper folded in half. Each has a specific number of holes stamped into it that signals the loom which color thread to weave.

Kimberly Reddick, a pattern card cutter who has worked at Langhorne Carpet since 1979, manually punched the holes in each card for the Hand in Hand tapestries. On Friday, her fingers moved effortlessly across small pegs as she rapidly arranged them to demonstrate how each card is punched.

"New factories have replaced Reddick's job with machines that punch the pattern cards," Morrow said, adding that, "Things are getting better. We were hit by the recession, but it's not a dying market."

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