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The AIDS pandemic: Business Journal intern and University of Michigan student Katrina Deutsch, of Armonk, tells of her eye-opening journey through South Africa learning how HIV/AIDS affects the country's youth.

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Cyber learning: Online classes are getting more and more popular. But for those looking for an easy way out of the work, these are not the answer.

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Metting down: For Kristi Stangeland, life as a Web site designer can get pretty hectic. She uses welding to help deal with the stress.

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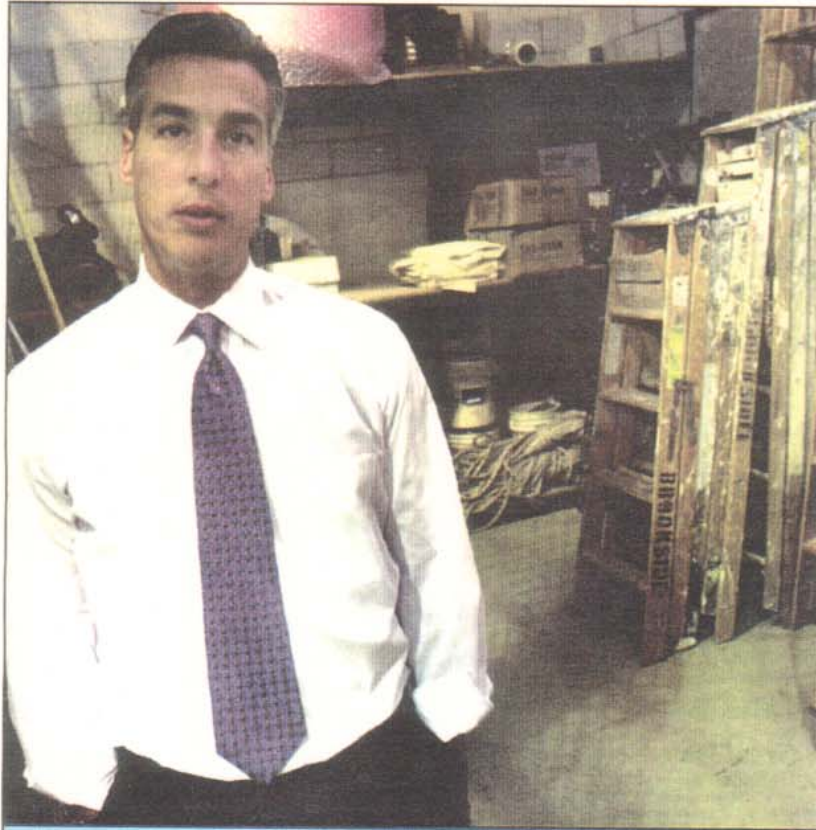
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COMPETITIVE EDGE: BROOKSIDE PAINTING INC.

Robert Wager, president of Brookside Painting Inc. in Pelham.

Brush strokes to success

By ANDREW SCOTT
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Robert Wager never imagined when he started his own painting business in a small office in seven years ago that he was brush strokes away from running one of the areas' notable painting contracting companies.

"If you had told me the company was going to expand this much and this quickly, I wouldn't have believed you," said Wager. But it was his dream.

Brookside Painting Inc. began as a two-man operation in 1987 from a small office on Brookside Avenue in Pelham. Within three years Wager worked side by side with others he employed to paint buildings even on Christmas and Thanksgiving days and

anything they could get their brushes on to build the business. In 1990, he moved the operation from the small office to a 15,000 square-foot-office and warehouse facility he purchased down the street.

"I'm not the average guy. If you ask me to jump, I'll ask how high," said Wager of his ability to please customers the best he can. So far it's the company's growth that's been jumping, averaging 15 percent to 20 percent per year since its hole-in-the-wall beginnings.

With 25 painters on hand, including foremen and supervisors, Wager describes business as phenomenal. "We're going through growing pains," he said. "We're working 24/7 by having day crews and night crews."

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5 firms net \$35M in capital

Market embraces early stage firms

By ALEX PHILIPPIDIS
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Capital markets will assist more early stage businesses as well as established companies over the next few months, observers say, based on a strong second quarter in which five Westchester businesses were awarded about \$35 million in financing.

Three of the five companies received first- or second-round financing, reflecting what market watchers say is more interest by venture and other equity capital firms in broadening their portfolios by helping early stage businesses.

"Just by looking at the business plans sent to us now compared to the last two years, we're seeing a resurgence as the economy starts to improve a little bit," said Emanuel Martinez, managing partner of GreenHills Ventures L.L.C., a New York City venture capital firm that is assisting several early-stage Westchester businesses.

The largest capital award went to an established company. Champion Energy Corp. of New Rochelle completed \$18 million in financing the company says will help it acquire additional heating-oil businesses. Citizens Capital and Brookside Capital of Greenwich, Conn., served as lead institutions.

"We plan to make acquisitions and roll them into our existing operation," said Peter J. Carini, chief executive officer of Champion Energy, which has annual revenues of \$150 million.

Champion Energy's eight heating-oil companies include Hoffman Fuel Co., which serves 8,000 customers in Westchester and another 25,000 in Connecticut's Fairfield County.

BIOTECH EXPANSION

Aureon Biosciences Corp., a Yonkers biotechnology company, won the second-highest award among Westchester companies.

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Business Journal photo by MATTHEW VINCI

PROFITS & passions

SUCCESSFUL BUSINESS PEOPLE HAVE MANY DIMENSIONS, THEY EVEN MANAGE TO HAVE SOME FUN.

KRISTI STANGELAND

WORKING WITH METAL HELPS HER SHINE

By CHRISTINA KOSTA PROCOPIOU

Kristi Stangeland didn't always know what she wanted to be when she grew up. She spent the better part of her career years as a certified public accountant, working at top financial firms like Solomon Brothers and JP Morgan.

Shortly after she moved out of Manhattan to Hastings-on-Hudson with her family eight years ago, she decided to try her hand at something new. Through a class at Purchase College, Stangeland found Web design and now the Minnesota native has a thriving business in Mustang Web Designs and a new outlook on life.

The courage to try things new did not only influence Stangeland's work, life and hobbies have taken root in places she'd never have imagined.

Apart from the hours she keeps creating or recreating Web sites for her small-business clients, Stangeland might be found digging around junkyards for some rare finds.

"I loved art as a kid. I never really imagined I'd get into welding though," says Stangeland who discovered the art five years ago through the help of a friend's husband who is a welder himself. After spending a day in his studio and taking a class at Purchase College, Stangeland was hooked. Although she had the intention of welding in her garage at some point, Stangeland generally creates her art during the summers at the college campus in Purchase.

Among her creations is a nightstand made from objects found in a Connecticut junkyard. "Sweet Dreams" is made from a huge pipe that rests between one large cog at its base and another at the top. Stangeland covered the top with a circular piece of glass to complete the table.

"The pipe and cogs — one about 2 feet in diameter, the other smaller — were totally rusted. I brought them back to the shop and used a sand blaster to take the rust off," Stangeland says.

She then used an oxyacetylene welder to weld the cogs to the pipe. With this torch — which she calls less intimidating than the MIG (metal inert gas) welder she uses more often now — goggles, gloves and a long-sleeve cotton shirt and long pants must be worn. An arc welder, the MIG is more powerful and requires that she wear a helmet in place of goggles.

Stangeland calls it very liberating to use the welding equipment. "I think it is very powerful to make something with metal. I grew up in a generation where women took home economics, not shop."

In class where a third of the students were women, many times women did better despite this fact. A lot of men, Stangeland says, came into class thinking they could master welding right away because they were used to making things with their hands or building or construction. "The women, it seemed, were often more willing to listen and ask questions," Stangeland says.



Some artists know what they want to create from the very beginning. For Stangeland, she may have an idea but says she does only a loose sketch and then lets the process dictate what the finished product will be like in the end.

She has created 10 metal works including: "Urban Tribal" (an abstract metal sculpture made of a manhole cover and four metal rods); "In Flight" (an abstract bird); and "My Summer Vacation When I Was 12" (made of metal and wood).

The latter is a fishing tackle box inspired by a fishing trip Stangeland took with her friend and her friend's mom when she was 12.

Hooked on making things with her hands, her love of welding inspired Stangeland to try something else: jewelry making. So far she has used a Wiglig jewelry-making tool to make some necklaces and earrings. She says this craft is similar to welding in that in both it's true that once you bend metal it will never go back to its original state. It takes great care, she says, not to make a mistake.

"I love these crafts because they allow me to make solid things," Stangeland says. "Most of us don't make anything solid or concrete anymore. It's great because in a sense you go back to your instincts when you work with your hands. It is nice to get back to that."