

competing
through
innovation

MONTANA

business & technology



www.MTbusinessandtechnology.com 2008 SPRING ISSUE



GROWING THE HI-LINE ECONOMY

How companies
are dealing with
**WORKFORCE
SHORTAGES**

MARKETING OUR TECHNOLOGY EXPERTISE—
BioScience Alliance
Montana Environmental & Engineering Consortium



\$4.95 USA



John Porterfield
President
Porter Block
porterblock.com

John Porterfield has been distributing and building with a product called the Endura block, a patented concrete block with insulation inserts, in Montana and the Pacific Northwest for about three years.

Now he hopes to begin to manufacture the innovative blocks out of mine waste and other raw materials in Libby and other sites in the state.

The University of Montana graduate is putting together a financing plan with public and private partners to build at least one manufacturing plant, likely starting with a facility at the site of the defunct Stimson Lumber Mill in Libby.

Total investment could top \$8 million, Porterfield said. He also hopes to tap into workforce training funds to teach and qualify local workers to operate the machinery.

“It’s clear that training is the name of the game,” Porterfield said. “The workforce doesn’t exist here yet.”

For his part, Porterfield studied recreation management at the University of Montana in the mid-1980s. In 1987 he got a job at Big Mountain in Whitefish (renamed Whitefish Mountain Resort). He skied and learned the ropes of tourism marketing. Through a family connection, he learned about a Utah-based company that held the patent for the Endura block. The block has more strength and better thermal qualities than regular concrete blocks as well as no mortar joint, Porterfield said.

He decided to build a home for his young family with the blocks, and, as he learned more about the company, the business opportunities with them sparked his interest further. And he liked his house.

“I was like, ‘Wait a second. I’ve never seen anything like this before. It’s amazing how well it performs,’” he said. That’s how new companies get started.

-Robert Struckman



Jennifer Stephens
Director
Montana Web Designers & Developers Association
mtwda.org

After getting a journalism degree at Gonzaga College, working as an Americorps volunteer and helping out at several non-profits, Missoula native Jennifer Stephens decided to get an MBA from the University of Montana. Some of her nonprofit friends, she recalls, thought she had gone over to the “dark side.”

But that mix of experience and education is now coming together in her joint effort with her husband, Nathan Stephens, to create the Montana Web Designers and Developers Association.

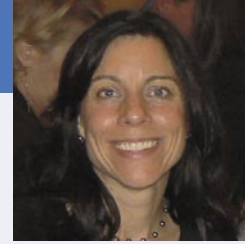
The fledgling organization aims to serve as a clearinghouse and networking tool for Montana’s highly fragmented Web development community. Most Web development firms are small shops—often just one person working from home—but their work is increasingly sophisticated, and the benefits of being able to network and collaborate with others is obvious.

Nathan Stephens, a Web developer himself, notes that different designers and developers have different specialties, and thus are often in a position where collaboration would be helpful on specific jobs. Indeed, the very name of the organization underscores this point: some Web site builders are really graphic design specialists, while others are programmers.

Jenn, 31, and Nathan, 29, are in the thick of building their organization. A key first step—no surprise—is building a strong Web site, which they are doing with some help from Modwest, the Missoula-based Web hosting and development company that practically qualifies as a gorilla in this business.

Jenn’s goal is “to have built a comprehensive database of designers and developers, connect members to one another, and offer outreach and services to link members to customers.”

-Jonathan Weber



Toni Tease
Principle
Tease Law Firm
teaselaw.com

Toni Tease’s boutique patent law firm is rapidly becoming an indispensable resource for inventors, entrepreneurs and technology companies in Montana. Her intellectual property work ranges from mechanical devices to antibiotics to software.

An East Coast native who was a pre-med student at Harvard before obtaining her law degree from the University of Connecticut, Tease moved to Montana in 1995 (where her relatives homesteaded).

Seeing a growing need for intellectual property and technology law in the state, she started her own law firm in 2003. In order to focus on patent law, Tease supplemented the science courses she had taken as a Harvard student, by attending MSU-Billings.

She proudly notes, “I am a patent attorney because of MSU-Billings.”

Last fall, one of Tease’s old instructors from called to ask her if she had time to take on a patent application for an anti-fungal compound developed at the school. Tease was delighted. Aside from her personal interest in the school, she said, it was a watershed moment.

“MSU-Billings is building a patent portfolio. It’s absolutely thrilling,” Tease said.

She teaches continuing education classes for attorneys about trademarks, patents, copyright law and related subjects. She also serves on an American Bar Association task force on national patent law reform and has testified in front of the U.S. Senate Finance Committee on intellectual property enforcement and how it affects Montana companies.

If you are ever in Times Square, New York City—check out the large M&M electronic billboard constructed by D3 LED, one of Tease’s patent clients in Bozeman.

-Robert Struckman