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Etsy VP Keynote Speaker at CEDC Roundtable

HUDSON, NY - Not only has Etsy become a household name as an international platform for sellers of all types, its Hudson office has grown from 11 to 81 employees in just three years while many Columbia County residents are among the more than 1 million artisans selling their wares on line.

Etsy Vice President of Member Operations Heather Jassy was the keynote speaker at the Columbia Economic Development Corporation's annual CEO Roundtable held recently aboard the Hudson Cruises, Inc. new ship, "The Marika." Etsy opened its offices on Columbia Street here three years ago with little fanfare. The Hudson office is the company's second largest and houses its Customer Support and Trust and Safety departments, according to Jassy.

"Etsy is an American success story and we are proud to support its progress," said CEDC Executive Director Kenneth J. Flood. "Not only is Etsy a boon to Columbia County's economic base, many of our residents are Etsy sellers. This innovative e-commerce business is a boost for all of us."

Etsy, an online shopping platform that connects buyers with sellers, was founded in 2005 by Catskill entrepreneur Rob Kalin and is headquartered in the Dumbo neighborhood in Brooklyn with offices in Paris, London, Berlin, Dublin, Toronto and San Francisco. Hudson was an obvious choice for an Etsy office because of Kalin's proximity to Catskill, a two-hour drive from Brooklyn and the rich cultural history of the area as well as the area's entrepreneurial spirit, according to Jassy.

"People think we are importing people here from Brooklyn, but that isn't true. We have tried to hire from the entire Hudson Valley," said Jassy. "We are putting the focus on hiring from the region." And people are paying attention. Etsy's Hudson office receives 100 applications for every one person it hires, she said. A job fair this summer netted 120 RSVPs with so many more people showing up the company had to turn them away. "The company will continue to grow here," predicted Jassy.

Germantown native Lucy Blaire has been selling her oilcloth makeup bags on her Etsy shop- www.LucyBlaire.etsy.com since 2008. “I was first introduced to Etsy when I was looking to create an online presence and brand around my sewing,” stated Blaire. “I quickly realized that there was nothing so user friendly on the market, period. From shipping that integrates with the post office to managing sales tax and driving traffic, it really is a priceless platform for anyone who wants to put in the work and have a career along a more unconventional path.”

Etsy recently added the instant download feature, making it possible for Blaire to combine her Etsy shop with her second job which is designing sewing patterns for various magazines. “Etsy is a company that continues to evolve just as its buyers and sellers do,” said Blaire. “With the addition of things like digital download sales, separate wholesale shops, and allowing certain outside manufacturing, companies born on Etsy can continue to grow within Etsy. It's an unrivaled tool for artisans like myself and everything I've accomplished to this point in my career can somehow be traced back to opening my Etsy shop.”

Lucy Blair has been featured on Etsy's [Featured Shop](#), as part of their [Quit Your Day Job](#) series, and also in the [Handmade Weddings](#) blog. Blair's website is www.LucyBlaireHandmade.com.

Livingston resident Cheryl Lickona has two Etsy shops selling pillows made from vintage fabrics and another selling vintage clothing – www.readyfreddy.etsy.com and www.readyfreddyvintage.etsy.com. “I opened both of my shops in 2007,” said Lickona. “Etsy became an incredibly valuable tool for me as it opened up markets not only in the United States, but worldwide. I had been doing shows with my fabrics and pillows, but Etsy let me reach out and connect with people who love handmade things and vintage fabrics. My success on Etsy reflects the energy that I put into it and I haven't begun to tap into the market that I know is out there. The umbrella of Etsy gives the opportunity of exposure and advice that you would be hard-pressed to find anywhere else in such a combined marketplace.”

Etsy's success has been touted by the media as the company continues to be a dominant retail source. “People want goods with individuality and meaning,” said Jassy of the concept. Etsy provides a “storefront” for more than 1 million craftspeople from 200 countries around the world, connecting interested buyers and sellers. The e-commerce website is focused on vintage and handmade items, along the lines of a traditional craft fair. Sellers are given their own personal online “storefront” where they list their goods for a fee of 20 cents per item. The company currently has more than 26 million items in its marketplace and 40 million members, according to Jassy. “There are more Etsy sellers in the five boroughs of New York City than there are yellow cabs,” she said. “We are the opposite of ‘Big Box’ retail. Etsy puts humanity back in commerce. It's about empowering many small and medium-sized sellers.” More than three-quarters of the sellers are women.

The privately owned company employs a total of 600 employees, according to Jassy. It began to turn a profit in 2009, four years after it launched, with \$1.3 billion in sales last year, she said.

Etsy employees participate in local events, including Habitat for Humanity, the Hudson Black Arts & Cultural Festival, Hudson Gay Pride Parade and other local events. "We want to share what we know about entrepreneurship by using the Etsy platform to empower local artisans," said Jassy. Etsy is a big proponent of using local vendors as much as possible, injecting money into the area's economy. The company is well-known for its employee-friendly benefits including encouraging employees to bring their dogs to work, providing a secret password for free ice cream at Lick on Warren Street, providing two locally catered lunches a week and buying desks made by Hudson artisan Rob Williams, Jr. who runs GrainWoodwork on Etsy. Etsy pays all health benefits for its employees and their families, said Jassy, who noted the company was recently voted the 19th best medium-size company to work for in the United States.

"Entrepreneurship is alive and well in Columbia County," stated CEDC Marketing Director Carol Wilber. "The economic value created by this talented and energetic business sector is phenomenal. The county's economy relies heavily on a spirit of entrepreneurship, with a predominance of small- and medium-sized companies making up the bulk of our local economy. And Etsy is making a huge contribution to its ongoing success."

Columbia Economic Development Corporation (CEDC), the leading economic development organization in Columbia County, is committed to strengthening the county's tax base through economic development and job creation while maintaining the quality of life so desired by the people who live and work here. For more information about CEDC programs and services, please visit our website at www.columbiaedc.com or call 518.828.4718.

PHOTOS



Heather Jassy and Cheryl Lickona | Lickona's Vintage Pillows



Lucy Blaire | Blaire's Oilcloth Makeup Bag | Blaire at her Catskill studio with daughter Marian



Blaire in her Catskill studio | Catskill studio

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