

Coloring the corporate world: Still going strong after 30 years

By **MELISSA CROCKETT MESKE**
macmeske@ibjonline.com

The arts are a formidable industry in the United States. In fact, prior to the pandemic, the nation's arts and culture sector was a \$876.7 billion industry, supporting 4.6 million jobs and representing 4.2 percent of the nation's economy in 2020.

The U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis numbers here might come as a surprise to some. And while the arts industry is still working hard to recover in this post-pandemic era, what might surprise someone a bit more is learning that a Trenton, Ill. arts industry-based company has managed to keep going and growing, spreading color throughout the United States' corporate world for 30 years now.

After all, Trenton, in western Clinton County, is a very small community; a 2020 Census population figure puts it at just under 2,800.

Patricia Schmidt founded Art Classics Ltd. in 1993 at its original location, 11 E. Washington St. in Trenton. That is where it can still be found today, now in its 30th year of operation.

In the early days, Schmidt's vision was financially supported by a private investor and a local bank, but she is now its sole owner.

"The spark that ignited Art Clas-

sics was a production process found while working in Europe," Schmidt shared. "The process allows an image to be reproduced to any size; mounted, coated and framed in any medium. This unique process allows customizing the selected art for individual client needs."

Art Classics began with four employees back in 1993. It has now grown to 30 employees, working in the original 35,000-square-foot facility. Key personnel responsible for daily operations now includes Schmidt's two sons, John and Ryan. The sons helped her start the business 30 years ago. Her daughter-in-law Heidi has since joined the firm as well.

"For many years, my office manager Mark Hensley and art photographer John LaBusier, have also been responsible for much of our success. The production staff, recruited from the local community, have been with us for years. This family-type relationship has served the business well," Schmidt said. "I am the sole proprietor currently; I hope the family will continue the business."

Niche operations for Art Classics include the service industry, hotels, restaurants, nursing homes and corporate offices. "We sell wholesale only," noted Schmidt. "We have sales representatives in all the states. We make clients aware of our art by providing four trade shows annually at High Point and Atlanta.

These shows are available online for all potential clients, and our website hosts our current inventory as well, along with a 360-degree video of our showrooms."

Justine Petersen's Galen Gondolfi, a friend of Schmidt's son Ryan and wife Heidi, made a recent visit to the Art Classics factory. He later shared his impression and insight with the IBJ: "They are one of the nation's leading providers of decorative artwork, be it to the hospitality sector including hotels and more, or services-oriented sector such as senior living communities. Patricia Schmidt is a pioneering interior designer who has served the Southwestern Illinois and St. Louis metro marketplace for decades."

Prior to Art Classics, Schmidt had also established an interior design firm, Patricia Schmidt Interiors, which she still operates today. The interior design firm does commercial and residential design, providing draft presentation detail and product. She retains her ASID certification with the American Society of Interior Designers and graduated from Maryville College with her Bachelor of Fine Arts degree.

When asked what the most significant challenges have been as an entrepreneur and building her family-owned business, Schmidt replied: "Constant learning of new technology, changing styles, and understanding what clients want or need."



Patricia Schmidt, ASID, is the founder of Art Classics Ltd., located in Trenton, Ill., and supplying the corporate and service industry with art for 30 years. She also owns Patricia Schmidt Interiors.

To learn more about Art Classics Ltd., visit online at www.artclassicsltd.com or call (618) 224-9133. To inquire further, readers can also email John Schmidt (john@artclassicsltd.com), Ryan Schmidt (ryan@artclassicsltd.com) or Heidi Schmidt (heidi@artclassicsltd.com).

Two employees move up through the ranks, thinking beyond the box

By **MELISSA CROCKETT MESKE**
macmeske@ibjonline.com

TWO MEN AND A TRUCK® employees Tom Schopp and Naim Gasanov have moved their way up the ranks of the company, eventually becoming part of the leadership team in one of the largest and oldest franchises, with locations in both Collinsville and St. Louis, Mo. The franchise footprint has over 50 trucks available to customers.

Schopp and Gasanov both started their careers at TWO MEN AND A TRUCK® as movers, with Schopp starting in 1998 and Gasanov in 2011. The duo recently became franchise partners in this largest and oldest franchise based out of St. Louis, originally opening in 1994. The franchise owner is John Judson.

Schopp worked his way up through various positions, working in every department and role imaginable, including logistics, customer service, sales, grassroots marketing, and customer care. He was eventually promoted to director of Hiring and Training, followed by his current role, director of special projects. He oversees the junk removal business, storage, and long-term leasing crate moves. Since taking on the junk business in 2022, Schopp has increased revenue by 30 percent.

Gasanov started with the company at the age of 18, working summers in high school. He is originally an immigrant who moved to the United States with his family via Russia in 2005, at the young age of 12. Gasanov's father wanted to provide a better life to his family, who had been living as Turkish immigrants in Russia, so he brought the family to the United States. Gasanov did not speak English when they arrived, but he wound up teaching himself by listening to music and watching sitcoms.

"The move provided opportunities to me and my family, and I hope now that I can pay it forward," he said. Gasanov currently serves as business development manager. And over the past five years, he's increased the brand's B2B revenues from \$250,000 to \$1.2 million.



From left, Naim Gasanov and Tom Schopp have moved up the ranks with the St. Louis-based franchise market of TWO MEN AND A TRUCK and are now franchising partners for the market region, which includes its St. Louis East/Collinsville location. (Submitted photo)

"The continuous growth made it an easy decision to join the franchise as a partner," Gasanov noted.

TWO MEN AND A TRUCK® in Collinsville has been "moving people forward" since 2003. Among the communities within its service region are Collinsville, Belleville, Edwardsville, Glen Carbon, Fairview Heights, and Scott Air Force Base.

"We service the entire Southwest region of Illinois, with the main warehouse located in Collinsville. Our primary target market continues to be customers in need

of local and interstate moving, junk removal and storage services," said Schopp.

"We are a full-service moving company. We offer packing, junk removal, storage and local-internal-interstate moving. We provide both residential and commercial moving, locally and nationwide," he added.

The Collinsville location recently moved into its new warehouse location at 19 ABC Parkway. It is conveniently located off Horseshoe Lake Road near Interstate 255. Nearby businesses include ABC Supply Co., InstaCredit AutoMart, Culver's, and the Van Fossen Soccer Park.

On the company website, the Collinsville location is identified "St. Louis East."

A brief history on the site shares some interesting stats and details:

"In 1994, we started TWO MEN AND A TRUCK® St. Louis out of a Kirkwood basement with one truck and a Yellow Page advertisement. What began as a small project quickly began to grow and in 1995, we moved our office to Brentwood. Our growth continued, and our parking spaces rapidly began to fill with trucks. In 2004, we consolidated all of our offices into one large facility in Sunset Hills, which ultimately allows us to serve the entire area quickly and conveniently. The demand for our services in the St. Louis Metro East area encouraged us to open an office in Collinsville, Illinois, in 2004. We currently operate an 11-truck fleet out of this office, and have performed more than 15,000 moves since opening!"

To read more about this location and what services they provide, visit online at <https://twomenandatruck.com/movers/il/st-louis/metro-east>.

Employing up to 40 during the summer season including part-time opportunities for local college students, there are nearly 200 people employed between the three locations. Training is completed at their main office, just 30 minutes from the Collinsville site. Right now, the franchise is looking to hire 100 people across its footprint, and 30 specifically for the Collinsville location.

Rising up to the challenges has admittedly been difficult at times, both Schopp and Gasanov noted. "The market change, price increases, and equipment shortages are some of the ongoing challenges in the moving industry," Schopp said, "but we always find a way. We continue to hire and provide training within the system."

"Our goal is to provide top service to customers while overcoming these challenges, as we understand how stressful moving can be," Gasanov added. "We are both happy to be joining in as franchise partners, and we hope to continue the growth of TWO MEN AND A TRUCK® in the surrounding St. Louis areas."