



PHOTO BY DOUG STROUD

THE CHIMES THEY ARE A CHANGING

PWC manufacturer targets European consumers

BY STEVE CAMPBELL

Tucked away in a commercial cluster off Liberia Avenue in Manassas Park, the melodic sound of wind chimes floats on the breeze.

Behind that gentle sound, the industrial buzz of a small manufacturer, QMT Wind-chimes, echos through the tightly packed parking lot.

Inside the 30,000-square-foot building, nearly 100 workers make, package and then ship the company's up-scale wind chimes.

The wind chimes retail at area stores, like Messick's Farm Market and CK Home & Hardware in Bealeton for \$20 to \$400.

Jimmy Messick's store has carried the chimes since opening 14 months ago. He says they sell well.

According to Kris Gibbs, who works at the market, a man bought one of the \$129 models and asked if the store had one in another color.

"A gentleman bought one of the larger ones, \$129. He

asked if we had a green one in the same size. I said, 'you mean instead of that one?' He said, 'no in addition to that one.' So he bought two of them," Gibbs says.

According to Helen Wyckoff, operations manager of CK Home & Hardware, the wind chimes do very well in her store in the Bealeton Village Shopping Center.

"They're one of the stronger brands that I've dealt with in 22 years," Wyckoff says. "I really like their price point. I like their quality and I like dealing with local vendors mainly."

The hardware store sells about a 100 units a year, and typically keeps that many on hand. Wyckoff likes that they're well made and harmonically tuned.

"When I do trade shows or home and garden shows, that's my number one item to bring," she says. "I like to show them off there. They sound wonderful, and they have a look to them that is

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very attractive and popular and it entices people to come to the booth.”

Patty Baisden, one half of the husband and wife team that owns QMT Windchimes, says their products are found in small and large shops all over the country.

“We were in Elkins, W.Va., and there was a tiny little shop and there were our wind chimes,” Patty says.

“That’s really fun to know that there are high-quality, made-in-the-U.S.A sourced products being sold in small mom and pop stores,” she says. “The shop local [philosophy] is alive and well because of what we’re doing.”

She and husband Jamie Baisden, company president, preside over a \$10 million a year enterprise that produces a wide variety of wind chimes, as well as bird feeders and houses, displays, and redwood planters, all from a crowded commercial building on Euclid Avenue in Manassas Park.

Born on the road

QMT founder Mike Throne started the company at his home in the early 1980s after years of selling wind chimes at Florida craft shows. He camped in a van, traveling to different shows and selling the chimes.

When the source of his products dried up, he began building his own handmade chimes. In 1986, he moved the operation to a 10-by-20 foot warehouse space, where he made the product during the week and then headed to craft shows to sell them on the weekends.

According to the company’s website, “Mike was determined to offer the buying public a chime that was as beautiful to see as it was to hear.

“And it worked; the demand for his wind chimes soon overwhelmed his ability to make them himself. So he took a deep breath and became a young entrepreneur following the American dream.”

Patty came to work for the company in 1996. Jamie joined in 2005 and a year later he and Patty bought the company.

In the past five years, the Baisdens have expanded the number of wind chime products, sizes and colors. Recently introduced colors include “groovy green” and “blazing blue.”

But Patty says, “Most of our chimes

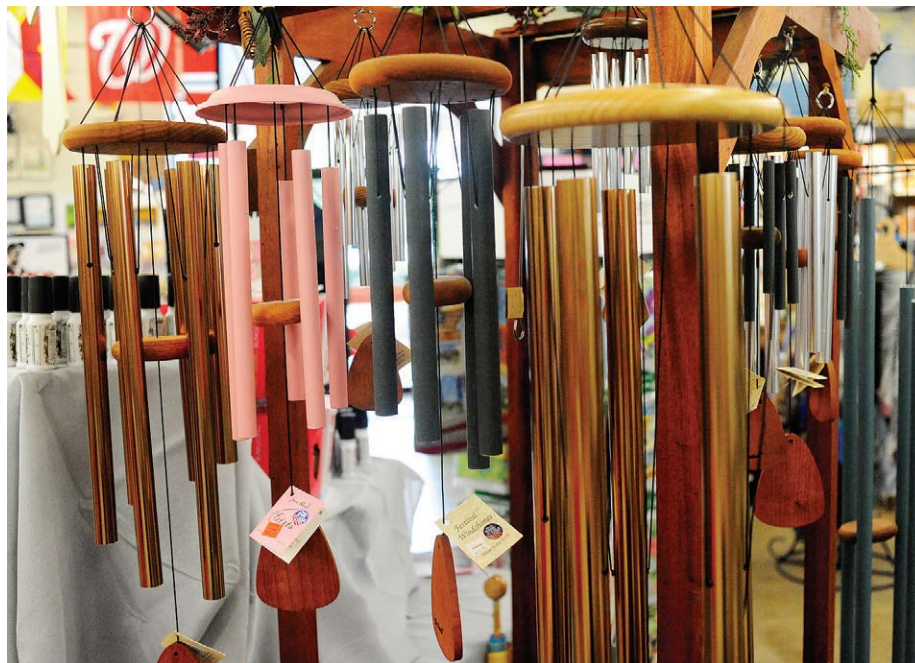


PHOTO BY RANDY LITZINGER

CK Home & Hardware displays the QMT Windchime models, including the pink Breast Cancer Awareness chime, for sale at the Bealeton store.

Being a manufacturer and a wholesale distributor and marketer gives us a very high level of control over our product.

— JAMIE BAIDEN, PRESIDENT
QMT WINDCHIMES

now are very neutral or garden-oriented colors, dark green or black or navy.”

The company’s newest brands include “In Loving Memory Windchimes” and “For the Girls Windchimes.” The former are engraved with inspirational verses, while the later were designed to support family members and raise money for cancer research.

“They carry a wide range of different styles,” hardware store owner Wyck-off says. “They have a higher end and a lower end. We carry a few of each.”

Making wind chimes

The company’s manufacturing facility fairly bursts at the seams in a rabbit

warren of spaces, each with a distinct set of tasks inside.

As the company grew, operations spread from that first 10-by-20 foot bay to gradually occupy the entire building.

“They started in one bay and leased one after the other until they had the whole building, which they bought,” Baisden says.

The manufacturing process starts with the raw materials: rough-cut redwood boards and 30-foot long extruded and powder coated aluminum pipe.

Workers cut, plane and sand the wooden components to size, after which they receive five coats of varnish.

“We buy our redwood a tractor-trailer at a time from California,” Baisden says. “To maximize what we get out of that tractor-trailer load, we buy it rough cut two inches thick.”

“All the wood gets cut up into little pieces by a computer controlled saw,” he says. “When it leaves this room, it’s been ripped, planed, embossed and cut to size.”

In the pipe shop, the long lengths are cut to specific sizes. All of the aluminum tubes are “tuned” to a specific

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musical key.

"They are all tuned to a chromatic scale in the cutting," Patty says. "Some people buy a chime based on the scale, whether it's F or G or A, because they are musical people. Or they want a couple of them and they want them to go together."

"One of the sales people is a former music teacher and she'll talk to them about chords. Will two different chords go together?"

Then the parts are moved to another area where staff assemble and pack the wind chimes.

At a separate 16,000 sq. ft space a few blocks down the road, shipping crews fill orders and prepare pallets of boxes for shipping.

"Most wholesalers don't ship two days after you place the order," Baisden says. "We're shipping on a retail time frame wholesale to help our customers."

U.S. made, globally sold

QMT's growth strategy, according to Baisden, involves increasing the level of support the company offers to its retail customers. As they grow, so the theory holds, so to will QMT.

"We help them thrive, and with them thriving, we'll thrive," Baisden says.

That growth strategy also calls for a doubling of sales over the next five years. QMT has no debt, owns its building and dominates its market, all of which confers a high level of flexibility both to withstand market downturns and seize opportunities as they arise.

"It allows us to weather storms very well. It also allows us to be very nimble," says Baisden. He and his wife

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**- HELEN WYCKOFF,
OPERATIONS MANAGER CK
HOME & HARDWARE**

are sole stockholders in the company and therefore can make fast decisions when needed.

"Being a manufacturer and a wholesale distributor and marketer gives us a very high level of control over our product," Baisden says. "It also requires a depth of knowledge and capability across a wide spectrum."

One of those opportunities takes QMT Windchimes products to the United Kingdom.

Already a prominent supplier of wind chimes in Canada, the company's recent push toward England and Europe creates a new challenge.

European customers, both retail and wholesale, aren't used to the idea of a high-quality and higher-priced wind chime.

It's a tough sale that requires the company to change attitudes of shop owners who've traditionally sold much cheaper wind chimes.

"Wind chimes in the European market aren't the same value proposition [as in the U.S.]," Baisden says. "We're not the cheapest. We're not the most expensive."

Store owners have to be convinced that the product is worth the price and that customers will see that value and buy.

So far, the value proposition is winning with a few stores admitting after they've

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tried the product that it sells, even at a higher price point than English customers typically expect.

"You have to educate the market that's there, both the end user and the store owner," he says.

Meeting the market

To get their message out and reach potential store owners, the Baisdens and their sales staff attend dozens of home and garden trade shows a year.

The in-house sales team provides a high level of customer service, keeping in touch with stores and helping them market the product.

The company spends roughly 6 percent of its gross revenue on marketing efforts. All catalogs, sales material, packaging and the like are produced by the in-house design team.

"We handle all the customer service. I can take care of you even if I don't see you at a show," he says.

Patty says several years ago, after a devastating flood destroyed several customers' stores in Colorado, Baisden



PHOTO BY RANDY LITZINGER

Joey Buongiorno hangs QMT Windchimes on a display at CK True Value Home & Hardware, one of several local retail outlets that carry them.

called the stores to tell them not to worry about paying QMT Windchimes until they had recovered from the damage.

"He said, 'Your invoices still exist. We're not forgiving them, but the due dates are gone. Don't worry about them,

get your shop back up and running'" Patty says.

Every one of the Colorado customers eventually paid in full and made an effort to stop by the company's booth at a trade show to say thank you.

"Because we deal mainly with small businesses, we sell a high level of customer service," Baisden says.

Wyckoff at CK Home & Hardware in Bealeton agrees. She likes the high level of service, as well as the quality of the products and the fact that they're made close to home.

"It's a good quality product and a nice company. I'm happy to work with them as one of their retailers," Wyckoff says.

For more information, visit QMT Windchimes at www.qmtwindchimes.com, call (703) 368-7924, or email sales@qmtwindchimes.com.

For information about CK Home & Hardware visit www.ckhardware.com, or call (540) 439-5541.

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