

BUSINESS PROFILE

Shelly Blunt repurposed

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Last summer when red-haired, fair-skinned Shelly Blunt had lunch with her mother and daughter at Clancy's in Fort Myers, it led to a business that would sell art on the Internet. The trio was a perfect storm of thought, she said with her supplying left-brain business savvy while her mother and daughter added that illusive creative talent.

The business, called Repurposed4you.com, does not sell only any art. It must be made, she said, from at least 60 percent recycled or reclaimed material, "things that would otherwise be thrown away."

Blunt decided to use some of her previous management, retail and artistic experiences to get her new enterprise hopping. She spent three year as a children's photographer in Lakeland, managed a pottery studio for a while and is a licensed massage therapist.

"I've taken everything I've done in the past and kind of put it all together," she said. "I like the retail aspect, but being a mom, the Internet thing is so nice, so much more convenient for everyone involved."

Repurposed4you sells things you've seen before, now available in different formats. Glass insulators have become candle votives. Silver clocks have been allowed to tarnish on purpose. Scrabble game pieces became Christmas ornaments, seat belts morphed into purses and sweaters are pillows. Soda pop tops transform into bracelets.

"We just don't like to throw things away," Blunt said. "My husband Jason thinks I'm



FLORIDA WEEKLY PHOTO BY EVAN WILLIAMS

Shelly Blunt and daughter

slightly crazy."

Jason is a marine electronics technician, and the family lives in Cape Coral.

"My husband and I just moved back to the Cape this summer and are buying the house I grew up in," she said.

Blunt was born in Youngstown, Ohio, and moved to Florida in 1980, when she was 6. She spent a few high school years back in her hometown, but considers Florida a permanent home.

"Where we were in Ohio never changed," she said. "It's like a Currier and Ives painting — the quaint little town in the snow...per-

fect...proper...frozen in time."

The biggest challenge Repurposed4you faces so far, she said, is getting the word out. Blunt advertised through Google, MSN and Yahoo ad words. Ad words is a service search engines provide to businesses. When a consumer searches for what is a "keyword," ads for that company appear along with their search results. If they click on the ad to visit the website, the search engine company charges the business owner a fee. Blunt also recently became part of Ecomall, a website dedicated to selling things that are better for the earth.

"[Ecomall] has been our biggest source of traffic," she said.

But business hasn't boomed yet, although it's the holidays.

"We've been getting a lot of hits, but not a lot of sales," Blunt said. "I'm trying to get this going so it can be a little more self-sustaining..."

"I'd like to be an outlet for more artists. I'd love to be that place for people who are making all sorts of things to show their creativity."

Now, five artists work for Blunt, not including herself, her mother and her daughter. They are hired as independent contractors, and work on commission. The artist gives her a suggested price for their piece, and they split a percentage of the sales.

Artists who apply to be sold on the site provide pictures of their work, a short biography, with a description of their "personal mission," like saving the earth, profit, or just making things.

Her daughter Audrey, 11, made bowls out of recycled records.

"They're not food safe, although we've had some candy in one of them" she said. "It makes a great decorative piece."

It's hard to categorize everything sold on her site because of the tremendous variety. But she tries to keep things in order.

That includes her family, she said, which will stay in Cape Coral and continue to grow.

"It just feels like home," she said. "Don't get me wrong — on a day like today before Thanksgiving and it's 85 degrees outside I miss Ohio. But we're flip-flop people now." ■

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