

Ventures pleased with thriving subsidiary

Kibak Tile in Redmond shows impressive growth

By Maren Cohn
Warm Springs Ventures

When Susanne Kibak Redfield happened to meet the chief executive officer of Warm Springs Ventures back in 2002, little did she realize what it would mean for the tile painting business she'd started in her kitchen 21 years earlier.

Ventures was looking for promising investment opportunities for the reservation's economic development corporation. And Kibak Tile needed a capital infusion.

Step by step, the chance meeting of the two principals led to a happy result: Ventures purchased a majority interest in Kibak Tile in October, 2002. Since then, despite some struggles, the Ventures-Kibak partnership has begun to reward both parties.

Kibak Tile occupies a large, open space in the middle of an old landmark building on Industrial Way in Redmond. Serving as a munitions depot in WWI, the structure has since undergone several incarnations, and presently houses a welder and cabinet maker along with Kibak.

The physical space resembles a mechanic's shop more than an art studio. Work tables run full length down the middle of the room, supporting stacks of tiles that wait to be painted, while other tiles in various stages of completion lie around individually or in racks. Circles of lamp light dot the areas where the painters sit.

Elsewhere in the room, tiles are piled everywhere: boxes of blanks at one end, completed orders ready for packing at the other, with packed boxes awaiting shipment squeezed in everywhere else. Kilns line an entire wall, fronted by large tables where batches of painted tiles accumulate before and after firing. Wooden shelves sagging under the weight of hundreds of plastic glaze bottles stand across from them on the far side. At one end of the room, two glass-paned offices look out upon the artfully chaotic scene.

The room exudes the feeling of healthy activity. Four years ago, though it held fewer workers, it looked much the same.

At that time, Kibak employed eight persons, including Redfield, the founder, designer,

and CEO, and general manager Rebecca Wood. With a boom and bust history, the company had employed more people in the past, but after 9/11 sales dropped sharply.

"We took a nosedive after September 11," Wood says. "We had a big contract with Disney for a hotel, but they canceled it. They had part of the project built and they actually tore it down. Nobody knew what would happen, nobody wanted to go ahead with plans to build hotels, and that was a big part of our business. We lost a lot of work and our revenues fell. It was too bad, because we'd been doing okay before that."

Ventures interest

In the midst of its slump, Kibak was an ideal candidate for Warm Springs Ventures' interest. It was a local company with solid distributor relationships all over the U.S. Kibak had significant potential to stabilize and grow, and it needed just the kind of infrastructure assistance Ventures could provide.

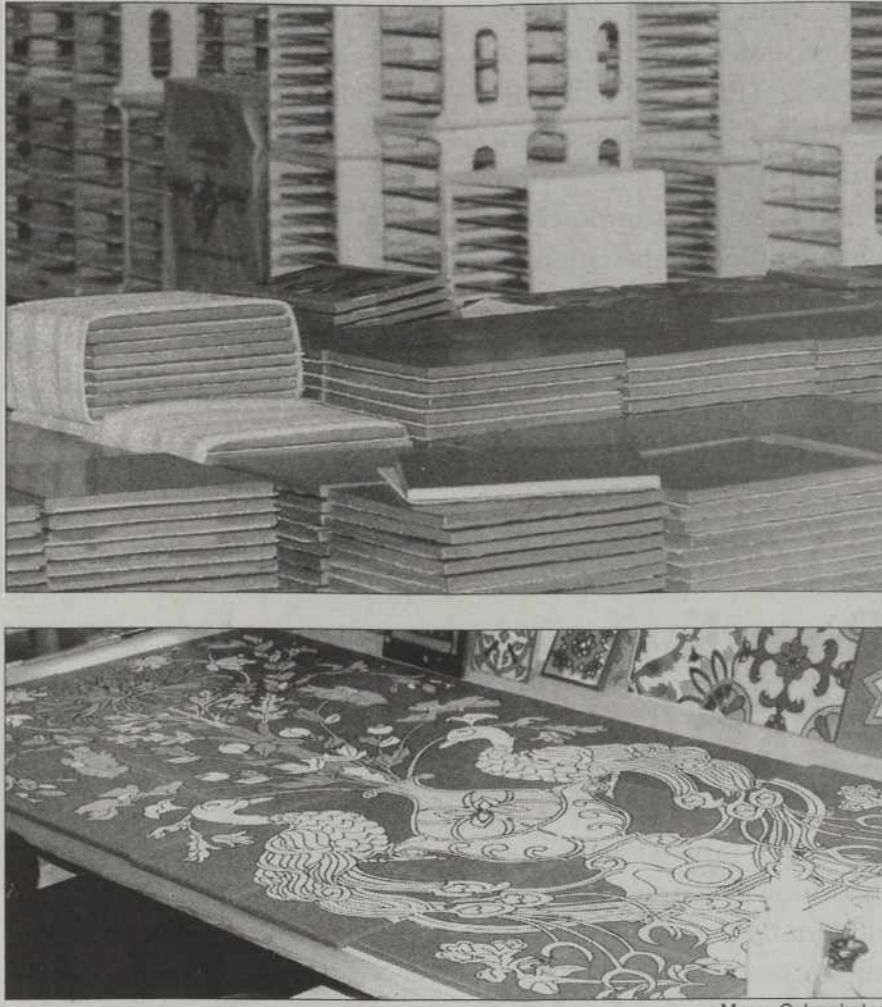
Also attractive to Ventures' leadership was the possibility of eventually bringing Kibak onto the reservation, where the company might thrive as a Tribal enterprise.

"We had the idea of initiating a 'Three Tribes Tile' product line," a former Ventures board member recalls. "We could market it in other Native American communities for use in hotels or casinos, and sell to outsiders as well."

Ventures' financial investment enabled Kibak to purchase new kilns, while its business and administrative staff began to provide various kinds of internal assistance. Since the restructuring of Warm Springs Ventures began last summer, the relationship between the two companies has become even closer. Ventures' support has meant that Redfield and Wood could devote themselves to expanding Kibak's product and building up a larger customer base.

"Working with the tribes and the people at Ventures has been great for us. It's incredible to work with Jeff and Sandra," Redfield says, referring to Ventures CFO Jeff Anspach and Administrative Officer Sandra Danzuka.

"They analyze our sales, watch our numbers — they help us see where we really stand. Thanks to their support we feel



Tile at Redmond Kibak Tile.

much more stable and confident."

Redfield's sense of stability and confidence is not merely a feeling; the numbers back her up. Kibak has grown steadily in every year since Ventures came on the scene.

The company now employs 23 people and counting, and for the past year has maintained three times the number of open orders as in the past. "Where we used to be working to fill 30 to 35 orders," Wood says, "now we have 130 going at a time."

From sales of \$278,000 in 2002, down from \$374,000 the previous year, Kibak reached \$697,500 in 2005 and may hit the million-dollar mark this year.

"We're so far ahead this year of where we were at the same time last year," Wood says, "that we'll be very close. If we don't quite get there it should happen in the near future."

With its location in Redmond, Kibak has not been able to hire tribal members, but current projects do include working more closely with the tribes.

"We're working with Lillian Pitt to develop an artist line of gift tiles," Redfield says. "We plan to sell them out of museums, in airports, gift shops, that kind of thing."

As for the Three Tribes Tile line and getting Kibak onto the reservation? That remains a vision for the future.

"Our company and Ventures would like to carry that out someday," Redfield says, "but we're just not there yet. We have to fulfill the potential of our

present location. We need to get up to capacity here and stabilize the business."

In the meantime, according to Anspach and others, Kibak is a thriving company that the tribes can be proud of owning.

More Indians recruited for construction work force

(AP) — After a divorce more than 20 years ago left Penny Painter without financial support, she struggled to make ends meet as a receptionist. Until one sunny day when she looked out of the office window and decided she'd rather be working "out there."

She filed her two week's notice and picked up the tools she inherited from her grandfather. "I decided to go into construction because I could feasibly see myself taking care of my daughters and actually owning a home," said Painter, a Portland resident of Klamath Modoc heritage.

"That's something single parents don't look forward at, and I have a Harley as of June of '05 — that was my ultimate goal."

To the 18-year carpentry veteran and single mother of three girls, a Harley she recently bought has come to symbolize time well-spent in the construction trades. After 23 years in the field, the 49-year old grandmother understands the promise of the trades.

She recently ended her career as a general contractor and now works to recruit more American Indian men and women to the trades as a work force development specialist with Cooper Zietz Engineering in Portland.

In 2005, Painter began work on a grant administered through the Oregon Department of Transportation's American Indian employment outreach initiative. The grant, awarded to Cooper Zietz in 2004, is an attempt by ODOT to increase the number of American Indians working on state highway and bridge projects.

Through joint recruiting efforts with Oregon tribes, employers and state pre-apprenticeship programs, Painter has been wildly successful at increasing the total number of Indian workers enrolled in construction apprenticeship programs, with American Indian enrollment across all trades increasing 115 percent in two years, according to Painter's grant analysis.

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