

CBJ

Corridor Business Journal

\$2.00 | A LOCALLY OWNED BUSINESS WEEKLY IN IOWA'S CREATIVE CORRIDOR | JAN. 29 - FEB. 4, 2018

CR marketplace offers small biz a platform

By Cindy Hadish
news@corridorbusiness.com

Seeing a low turnout of customers at a craft fair inspired Robert and Cherie Edilson to create their own support for Cedar Rapids entrepreneurs.

Ms. Edilson operates her own small business and was a vendor at that show.

Knowing how much effort his wife and other vendors put into preparing for such events, Mr. Edilson, 36, decided to use his web development skills to create the Cedar Rapids Marketplace, a sort of virtual farmers market, minus the fruits and vegetables.

Ms. Edilson, also 36, contributed her knowledge as a small business owner and blogger.

Together, they launched cedarrapidsmarketplace.com one year ago. It has grown to include more than 60 businesses, starting from about 10.

Each business owner pays either a flat \$15 monthly fee or a 10 percent commission to have their products promoted and sold on the website, which offers a familiar e-commerce experience for shoppers.

Many participating businesses use the Cedar Rapids Marketplace as their primary website, while continuing to use their own business Facebook page and other social media. Baked goods, artwork, clothing and accessories are among the items sold on the site.

A Navy veteran, Mr. Edilson operates his own website design and digital marketing business, Edilson Web Design, which provided the background for search engine optimization and other features offered through the Cedar Rapids Marketplace.

Ms. Edilson started her company, The Pink Barrette, in 2012, selling handmade hair bows and accessories at farmers markets, craft fairs, on her own website and Amazon. She blogs about being an entrepreneur, wife and mother to four young children at highslowsandhairbows.com.

The Marion couple's website notes the mission of the marketplace: To allow consumers to learn about and shop from different, local small businesses from the comfort of their own homes; to give a platform for small business owners to promote and sell their products without much risk or investment on their end; and to keep the connection thriving between small businesses and their customers.

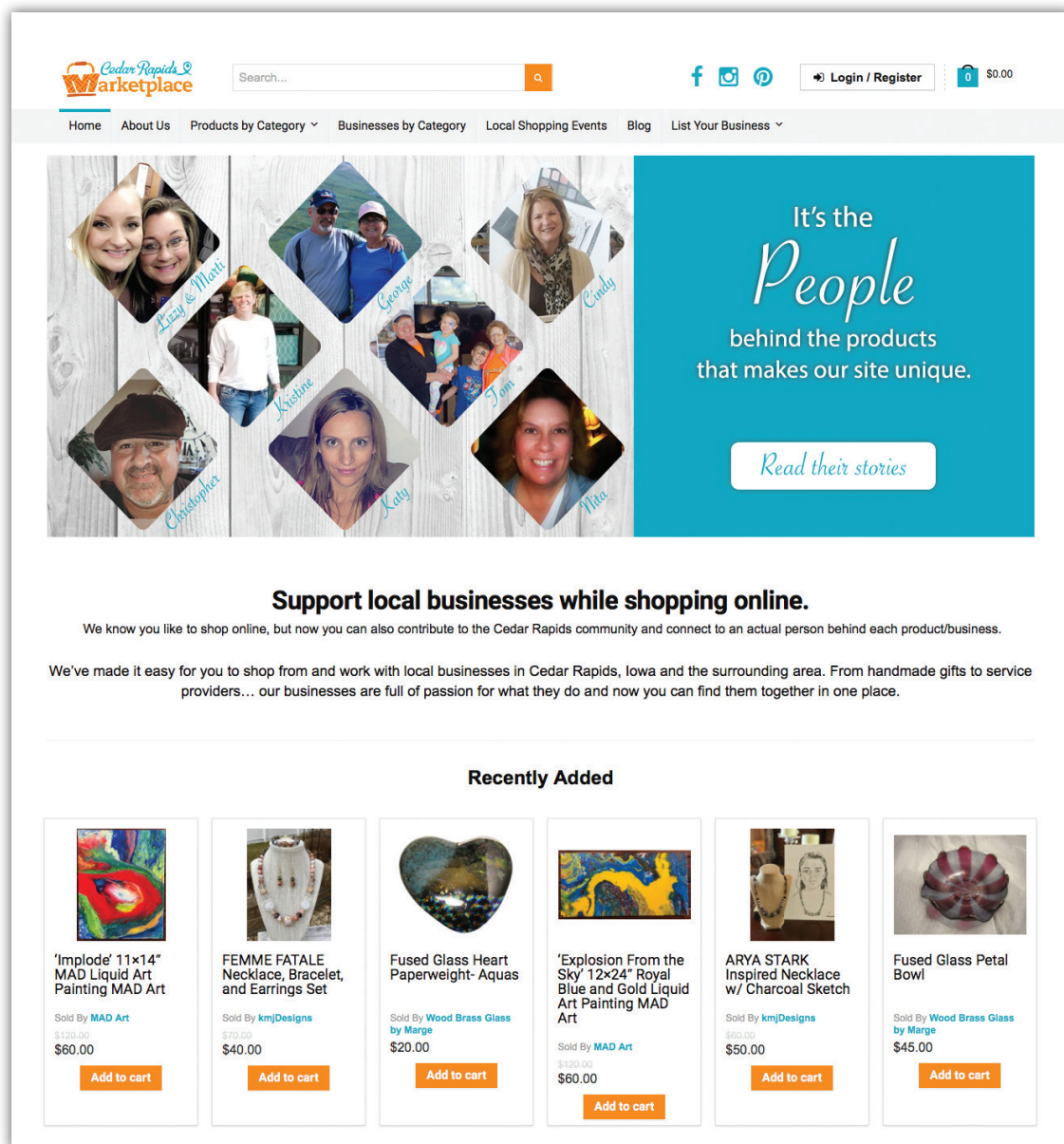
"Because consumers are now making many of their



Robert and Cherie Edilson created the Cedar Rapids Marketplace as a way for local small businesses to better connect with customers. PHOTO CR MARKETPLACE

“We’re catering to those in-home businesses with one to two people who are making things. I feel like we’re a good starting point for them.”

- Robert Edilson, co-founder of the Cedar Rapids Marketplace



A screenshot of the Cedar Rapids Marketplace website. The site includes personalized coaching and stories of business owners and their products. PHOTO CR MARKETPLACE

purchases through online marketplace sites, we strive to bring Cedar Rapids-area small businesses together, and rally our community to support them," the website states.

All of the products sold on the marketplace must be made, produced, fashioned or transformed in Iowa, Mr. Edilson said.

"We're catering to those in-home businesses with one to two people who are making things," he said. "I feel like we're a good starting point for them."

A business listing on the website provides another spot for services, such as pet sitters or investors.

The website works somewhat like e-commerce hub Etsy and other sites used by small business owners. But the CR Marketplace offers several advantages, including personalized coaching offered and stories of the business owners and their products.

Additionally, products can get "buried" on a

huge site like Etsy, Mr. Edilson said, and business owners on the Cedar Rapids Marketplace can offer local delivery and pickup for buyers within the area.

The community appears to be responding, with sales on the site and usage both continuing to increase.

Eventually, the couple would like to expand to other parts of the state – but not until the success of the Cedar Rapids Marketplace has been established.

"We're still definitely in that startup phase," Mr. Edilson said. "We're reinvesting everything back in the business right now."

Ms. Edilson said their work has increased their appreciation for other local entrepreneurs, adding that they did most of their Christmas shopping on the site.

"We're like proud parents in a way," she said. "We want to tell people about it, because it comes from people in our community." CBJ