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Wednesday, October 15, 2008

Local spotlight

Musician's clothing sings 'Detroit Rocks'

Entrepreneur creates brand name for creative endeavors including video graphics and signs.

Maureen McDonald / Special to The Detroit News

ROYAL OAK -- With the soul of the city in his heart, creative entrepreneur Robert Dempster created the brand "Detroit Rocks," to identify his T-shirt, rock band, sign company and video enterprise. With wit and creativity one of the income streams creates enough cash flow for rent and salaries.

"We rock," says Dempster, 59, whose auto-themed music became the official Woodward Dream Cruise CD for 2008 as well as the background rhythm for customers coming in to purchase "Detroit Rocks" shirts or other Detroit themed Ts to wear at the next music concert. He also creates graphic wrapping for trucks and concrete and brick signs for cities and shopping plazas with custom installation prices up to \$20,000.

Dempster, who started his first band at age 16 and played the Grande Ballroom at 17, says rock 'n' roll is synonymous with Detroit's best moments. One title gives identity to several enterprises. "I'm a whacky, creative guy whose life has been inspired by music. I use that to inspire everything I do."

Advertisement

Creativity rocks for many Detroiters. According to a report Detroit Renaissance Foundation commissioned from Austin, Texas-based Angelou Economics, there are more than 33,000 people working in southeast Michigan's creative sector -- advertisers, architects, writers, designers, film and music producers, graphic, visual and performing artists. And their industries are growing twice as fast as the service sector and four times as fast as manufacturing.

Clear communication with clients is as important as a creative design. Dempster conducted branding for Western Market, the city of Bloomfield Hills and others.

"Robert did a nice job designing and fabricating a sign for us," said Irving Swider, manager of Meadowbrook Plaza in Troy, who commissioned him in 2007. Tom Hopkins, a manager at

Wright and Filippis in Rochester Hills, recently hired Dempster to create a brand image for the medical equipment supplier that could appear on business cards, work shirts and vehicles. He recommended the company show graphic pictures of its customers on its trucks -- rolling billboards -- instead of just a name. Once more, he designed their theme music.

University of Detroit Mercy Marketing Professor Michael Bernacchi said an increasing number of entrepreneurs are running multiple ventures. "The real kick in creativity comes from juggling multiple ideas. It spreads the risk -- and the rewards."

Dempster keeps expenses low by maintaining a minimal space that can serve multiple purposes. But he admits the credit shortage stops him from carrying an array of long sleeved T-shirts and hoodies.

Maureen McDonald is Metro Detroit freelance writer.

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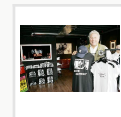
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Robert Dempster, longtime band leader and T-shirt silk screener, is creating a brand image, Detroit Rocks. For the past year, Dempster has operated out of a storefront on Woodward Avenue in Royal Oak. (Velvet S. McNeil / The Detroit News)

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More information

Detroit Rocks

- **Specialty:** The 500-square-foot store retails rock and specialty T-shirts, CDs and signs for wholesale and retail customers.
- **Owner:** Robert Dempster has been producing music and T-shirts for more than 30 years, with the help of three current employees and over a dozen contractors.
- **Contact:** Call (248) 398-9999 or visit www.detroitrocks.cc or www.dempsterdesigns.com

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