

“Upscale store in Japan features state artists”
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By: Jennifer Ginsberg
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Nagoya – Wooden spoons and salad tongs carved by employees at Allegheny Treenware in Preston County sit in a display at an upscale mall owned by Mitsukoshi Ltd., one of Japan’s largest department store chains. The large utensils seem a little out of place on a traditional Japanese table, where chopsticks – not serving spoons – are the norm. “For us, the spoons are popular. We didn’t know they would be giant spoons,” said Kate McComas, director of Thomas-based MountainMade.com “I have a better idea of the Japanese market now.”

Items from 20 West Virginia vendors, such as quilts, beeswax candles and iron flowers and snakes, were part of a display to test Mountain State exports. About 600 artists, musicians, authors and craftspeople sell their wares through MountainMade.com. Less than 1 percent of those artists export their wares outside the United States, McComas said. Japan could prove to be a successful place to sell West Virginia items. “It is our goal to increase business development and continue looking for new markets,” she said. “This could potentially be a lucrative market.” West Virginia businesses exported \$3.3 billion worth of goods in 2004, with \$361.5 million going to Japan, making the Asian country the state’s third largest recipient of exported goods behind Canada and Mexico, according to the U.S. Department of Commerce.

West Virginia was number 35 of 53 in a ranking of states and territories that exported items to the world in 2004, and No. 32 on the list of exports to Japan. Worldwide exports from the Mountain State have increased by \$1.37 billion since 1999, and by about \$102 million to Japan. Mountain State companies need to export their goods beyond the country’s borders because 95 percent of the world’s consumers live outside the United States, said Steve Spence, executive director of the West Virginia Development Office. Companies that sell their products on a world level also tend to be more competitive, and pay their employees about 15 percent more in wages than companies that don’t export, according to the U.S. Department of Commerce.

Japan is made up of four main islands and is about the size of Montana. The country has few natural resources and imports most of its raw materials. It imported \$4.5 trillion worth of goods in 2004 up from \$1.4 trillion in 1987, according to Japan’s Ministry of Finance. Ken Nomura contacted the West Virginia’s Japan office about four years ago and was hooked up with Fenton glass. Now, he’s an authorized Fenton dealer. He imports and then sells the glassware at his stores called Glasstique JOYFUL. The glass pieces sell well because there’s nothing like them in Japan, he said.

The West Virginia Japan office staff contacted him and gave him a MountainMade.com catalog to see if he wanted to sell any of these items; he said. So, he picked out a few that he thought would sell well. Nomura said he might order the products in the near

future, but is still testing two or three more markets to see what sells well where. The test sale at the shopping center has helped him realize he must tweak the inventory a bit. Nomura is looking for West Virginia items with more of a Japanese size and flavor. Some of the items on display, like martini glasses, utensils and candles are a little too big for his customer's taste.

He's found that many Japanese prefer smaller Fenton pieces like vases to better fit their houses. The 10-by 10-foot display area is in the upscale shopping center's prime location, right by the main door. Nearly 30,000 people walk past the display each day, Nomura said. Mitsukoshi Ltd. owns the center and allowed Nomura to have the space rent-free and commission-free for about a week because the city's good relations with the state's Nagoya office, he said. The space would typically cost about \$1,000 a month. "Nagoya has been very good to us," said Ken Crockett, director of the West Virginia Japan office.

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