A Creative Affair - Tying the Knot With Arts & Entrepreneurship

Top That - A contemporary collection of ceramic sculpture debuts during Long Beach Island's Premiere Wedding Event April 2011

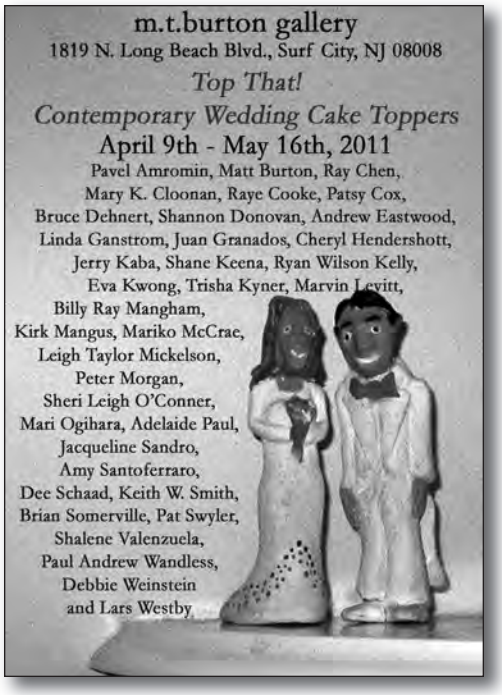


Photo Courtesy of M.T. Burton

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By Lori Pepenella

Call it a marriage made for the new economy, art and commerce working together to achieve the same goal; creating a unique and enriching experience that will not only attract lucrative business to an area but revitalize how artists can market their work. As consumer spending habits still remain unclear; shore area businesses have begun establishing stronger relationships to send targeted marketing messages out to visitors and residents. It seems creativity has become the hot commodity needed to make business strategies stand out in the 21st century.

Local artist and business owner Matt Burton has partnered with the Long Beach Island Region Destination Marketing Organization to introduce his art form to new audiences coming to the area for one of New Jersey's most talked about wedding events, The Wedding Road Show. Burton has assembled what he believes is the first exhibit of Wedding Cake Toppers by clay artists which will make its debut the evening before the Wedding Road Show at an April 9 reception held at the m.t burton gallery in Surf City. Burton is a graduate of Roanoke College and holds a Bachelor of Arts Degree with a Fine Art major with a concentration in ceramics, painting and art history. He received his Masters of Arts degree from Stephen F. Austin State University in Texas where he began his concentration on ceramic sculpture, graduating with a ceramics major and painting minor. His many years of experience include working as a production potter, exhibiting in fairs and festivals throughout the east coast, and

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teaching ceramics and drawing at the Long Beach Island Foundation for the Arts and Sciences in Loveladies. He also began teaching drawing and design at Ocean County College in Toms River. In 2000, Matt opened the m.t burton gallery & 19th Street Clay Studio in Surf City. The gallery features fine art, pottery and antiques, plus a sculpture garden. The New Jersey fine arts gallery is the host site for the annual juried competition, the Jersey Shore Clay National with the 19th Street Clay Studio providing visiting artist workshops, classes and residencies.



Photo Courtesy of M.T. Burton

"Royal Wedding" cake topper by artist Pat Swyler

Both Matt and the Long Beach Island DMO are very excited about this exhibit, which now involves thirty artists nationwide contributing their cake toppers to the exhibit that will run through May 16, 2011. The group of artists that Burton has assembled include long time island sculptor Marvin Levitt who has crafted several pieces which will be on display, as well as works from accomplished artists such as Leigh Taylor Mickelson, Dee Schaad, Amy Santoferro, Debbie Weinsten, Lars Westby, Mariko McCrae, Adelaide Paul, Mari Ogihara, Jacqueline Sandro, Billy Ray Mangham and Raye Cooke. Each piece will be for sale and will reflect a very personal style and design. The Wedding Road Show has increased demand for LBI Region wedding services in the traditional sense; such as florists, tuxedo rentals, bakeries and venues. It is the hopes of the all involved in this project that it will create similar demand for art and introduce a new tradition of gift giving with an emphasis for hand made works of art. This type of synergy is the model of what art advocate groups such as ArtPride New Jersey are looking to establish through its Discover Jersey Arts program; keeping in step with programs that are being launched across the country. "Pop culture should not be the enemy of the arts, it should be one of its greatest allies. We've see the positive impact TV shows like *'Glee'* and *'So You Think You Can Dance'* have had on increasing public interest in the performing arts in recent years," said Jim Atkinson, Discover Jersey Arts Program Director at *ArtPride New Jersey.* "An exhibition like this can have a similar effect on the visual arts by illustrating that art can, and should, be accessible to everyone. In the end, that's also just good business."

Creativity and the art of bringing new business across the threshold is what the Wedding Road Show is all about. This event was developed by the Long Beach Island Region DMO to spotlight the area's blossoming destination wedding industry by showcasing

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local venues and wedding professionals. Drawing brides from across the country to participate in the dozen open houses that take place throughout the region, this free event also offers a chance to win a wedding reception grand prize valued at over $15,000 featuring catering, flowers, photography, video, favors, invitations, wedding cake, reception site and wedding night accommodation. With pre and post contests, videos and ongoing promotion year round, the success of what was planned to be a one time event has lead to its third year. Sponsored by wedding industry powerhouses such as *The Knot, New Jersey Bride, WedAlert.com, NJWedding.com, Brides.com, radio station Magic 100.1 fm and New Jersey Division of Travel and Tourism;* The Wedding Road Show has recently been nominated to receive a New Jersey Governor Award for Tourism Excellence.



Photo Courtesy of M.T. Burton

"First Wedding" cake topper by artist Pat Swyler

The Top That Contemporary Wedding Cake Topper Reception takes place Saturday April 9 and promises to taste as good as it looks, with each topper being displayed on a custom decorated cake tier provided by *Moester's Bakery of Manahawkin* as well as samples of their best selling wedding cake flavors and other catered delicacies by *Plate Restaurant of Surf City.* During the Wedding Road Show on Sunday, April 10, look for the m.t. burton gallery to be promoting **Top That** and the sale of the toppers at the Surf City Yacht Club. After the festivities the exhibit will continue through May 19 at the m.t burton gallery, 1819 Long Beach Blvd., Surf City. For more information contact the m.t burton gallery at **609-494-0006** or mtburtongallery.com. To find out more about the Wedding Road Show contact the Southern Ocean County Chamber of Commerce at **609-494- 7211** or go to visitLBIregion.com.

- Lori Pepenella is a member of the Ocean County Cultural & Heritage Commission and is the Destination Marketing Director of the Long Beach Island Region Destination Marketing Organization (DMO) at the Southern Ocean County Chamber of Commerce.