

Unique products have special spot on new Web site



This packet of four bars of soap was made by Julie Bartlett of Interior, owner of Badlands Soap.



PHOTO BY GREG JOHNSON

Artists and products featured on the States Pride Web site include Dave Huebner and his Dakota Stoneware Pottery.

Trio tries to match buyers with hidden gems

BY RANDY HASCALL
Argus Leader

Three South Dakota men have launched a Web site to showcase some of the best products, services and attractions that this state and the rest of the nation have to offer.

States Pride is a new Internet market venture by Brian Walton and Kevin Brown of Vermillion and Greg Johnson of Tea.

Their plan is to uncover some of each state's hidden treasures and introduce them to consumers — items such as Vermont ash baskets, Alaska totem carvings and Black Hills honey.

The Web portal also provides a new market for producers. One advantage is that all 50 states are connected at one location.

"People will be able to click on the map and see neat things from each of these states," Brown said.

Because the Web site — www.statespride.com — is so new, some state listings are in early development. The priority of the three partners was to establish a strong South Dakota base, adding listings for other states as

they can.

South Dakota's listing includes information and photographs of artwork, crafts, food, museums, art galleries, bed-and-breakfasts and entertainment.

"Our focus isn't so much quantity as it is quality," Johnson said. "We're looking for items that are culturally authentic. We offer sage soap, beeswax candles, handcrafted pottery."



Kevin Brown



Brian Walton

Julie Bartlett of Interior said she's excited about the potential markets the Web site could open up for her business, Badlands Soap.

"I think it's a wonderful idea," Bartlett said. "It can really help out micro-businesses like mine. I think tourists get tired of the generic, mass-produced souvenirs."

Bartlett makes bars of soap by hand in a variety of scents, including sage, wild rose, sweet grass, lavender, cedar and cinnamon spice, using mostly plants collected on her family's ranch.

She has promoted her soap at a show of Dakota-made products and sells it at Crazy Horse Monument, but



One of artist John Wilson's works on States Pride.

much of her publicity has been through word of mouth. She sold between 5,000 and 7,000 bars of soap last year.

Dave Huebner of Dakota Stoneware in Bushnell said he already does a tremendous amount of business, but the Web site might save him a few trips out of state, which is where 80 percent of his sales occur.

"People from out of state can look it up rather than me having to drive a long way," Huebner said. "The more I can sell without leaving the state, the better. It's hard for South Dakota artists to find a market."

States Pride receives a 15-percent commission on products. There's no setup fee and no monthly listing fee for products or services,

but there is a listing fee of \$4.95 a month for destinations.

Clients can change their products, prices and pictures any time.

Good product and destination Web sites exist in many states, but they're difficult to find and aren't connected, Walton said. This site is secure and not only links all 50 states but also can put customers directly in touch with producers.

States Pride would provide a good tool for state tourism departments, a local author trying to sell books, or even churches that publish cookbooks, the men said. If the venture becomes a big success, they intend to hire a salesperson.

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