

# Planting a SEED

An inspiration for  
a sentimental gift  
is growing a new  
business

By ROBERT M. COOK  
Staff Writer

**K**ITTERY, Maine — Unlike a lot of carefree bachelors, Brent Beckett's refrigerator is actually pretty full, but not with beer and pizza boxes.

Wedge between several yogurts and plas-jugs of water, milk and juice are 18 carefully preserved Colorado Blue Spruce seedlings that are at the root of Beckett's newly launched business.

He buys them from Western Maine Nurseries in Fryeburg, and includes each one inside a box he calls A Tree Story which he hopes eventually to sell nationwide.

Beckett has created a company, Beckett Limited Editions of Portsmouth, to market the product, which he portrays as a gift of pure sentimentality, centered around a plastic tube that contains one of the spruce seedlings.

For \$39, A Tree Story consists of a hand-crafted box that contains an explanation about the gift followed by a page where the giver can write their name, who they are giving to gift to and for what purpose.

A bag of a dozen wooden stars that can be planted with the seedling symbolizes whatever wishes, goals, hopes or dreams the A Tree Story's recipient may want to incorporate.

Another bag of "sincerity" comprised of pine cones and other potpourri can be sprinkled around the base of the tree as a way to complete the ritual.

It also includes a journal called "The Wind" that allows the recipient to document the recipient's feelings.

"In time this tree will grow and the stars will move to the sky. You too will change and perhaps be somewhere else, but the place of the tree will remain the same. The stars will be there to guide you back and the wind will whisper the story when you return," concludes A Tree Story's introductory passage.

Beckett said the gift is not confined to traditional holidays. He believes businesses

could give these to employees. They could also be used by corporations to help woo or thank clients.

Beckett believes the world needs a new gift that anyone can give which will immediately convey the feeling and heartfelt emotions many traditional gifts and greeting cards can no longer offer.

But getting the public, craft fair organizers and even other retailers to understand this product is probably Beckett's greatest challenge.

At 30, Beckett was inspired to start his new company in September after mulling over the idea for more than two years.

He quit a corporate job he had in Rochester, N.H., working in advertising and promotional writing for a financial firm. While he said he made a good salary and benefits, "I wasn't inspired by the rat race."

Beckett was also frustrated at how little inspiration he found from his job, which is a place he believes people need to find it the most.

For many years, Beckett found that he was also turned off by how "gift giving has become more an obligation instead of a celebration."

He believes so little gift giving today includes any creativity or effort to really show the people we care about how important they are and he believes Tree Story could change that.

"Where's the integrity?" is the question that drove Beckett to carve out a different path for himself and his new company. After leaving his last job, he headed west and spent six months living with his older brother, Bruce, in Nevada.

There the two brothers brainstormed almost daily how they would put such a company together and how they could market the product.

Beckett said he wanted to not only find a

☆ *A Tree Story*

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# A Tree Story: An idea grows

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way to operate a successful business, but wanted the venture to include his appreciation for the environment, nature and creativity.

"People don't have to think for themselves anymore and this is a gift that demands that. Society's become so plugged in, we're actually disconnected from each other and from ourselves and I'm hoping this gift gives people a way to stop, just like they would stop to smell the roses or stop and plant a tree," he said.

After returning from Nevada, Beckett started his business last fall and began distributing limited quantities of his product earlier this spring.

Although the business is based in Portsmouth, everything from processing orders he receives over the phone or via the company Web site to shipping is done out of the small cottage he rents in Maine.

Beckett tends bar at Cafe at Shelton's on York Beach to pay the bills and support his business goals.

Little by little, Beckett's efforts to introduce the product throughout the Seacoast are paying off.

The Flower Kiosk shops in Portsmouth, N.H., and Rye, N.H., Shelton's gift store at York Beach, Mainely Crafts in Kennebunkport and Western Maine Nurseries have all agreed to sell Tree Story for him.

Western Maine Nurseries has also agreed to sell Tree Story on



Barry Carr/staff photo

**BRENT BECKETT** of Kittery, Maine, relaxes in the shade with copies of his new gift idea, "A Tree Story."

its company Web site.

He has also reserved a table at the upcoming Market Square Days in Portsmouth and the Yarmouth Clam Festival in Maine.

Eventually, he hopes to sell an average of 300 to 400 Tree Story packages a month. He believes this year's Christmas season will determine whether the company will make it.

"I haven't met anybody that didn't like the idea," said Beckett.

Peter Andersen, owner of Andersen Building Co. in Rochester, said he gave a Tree Story to a client who recently lost a beloved dog.

"They sent me a card, the

likes of which I had never before seen," said Andersen of the response he received from the clients.

"It's hard to share with somebody in a meaningful way if they've suffered a terrible loss," Andersen said. "They may cost more than a card, but it's worth it."

Andersen said he is ordering two more Tree Story gifts to give to other clients because he is so taken with them.

Lori Burdwood, who works as a buyer for the Flower Kiosk shops, said, "We're thrilled" that they can sell them.

She sees Tree Story as "a complete package. It's an art piece in that each one is hand-

crafted and it's a great way to commemorate a wedding or an anniversary, and it's a great grief tool."

Unlike cards or flowers, Tree Story is a gift that can be handed down to each generation, giving it an element of perpetuity, Burdwood said.

The flower shops are hoping to stock at least a dozen at all times.

Beckett said the seedlings can be stored in their plastic tubes for up to 40 days before they have to be planted. If they are refrigerated in the tubes, they can wait indefinitely to be planted.

For Rita Calamari of Durham, Tree Story seemed like a perfect way for her to give her 7-year-old nephew, Andrew, a gift to mark his first communion. She said she mailed it to him in New York.

"That little boy was so delighted that he called me long distance" and thanked her for the gift after planting the tree with his family, Calamari said.

She said the cards and checks that other relatives sent her nephew will sooner or later be forgotten, but he will always remember the tree.

"We hope this little tree will grow and that you will remember this communion day whenever you look at it," is what Calamari said she wrote on the personalized page inside the Tree Story box.

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