

# Word Travels Fast

BY RYAN N. FUGLER

*One-man shop lets his work do the talking.*



**Company:** Bordi Designs

**Owner:** Andy Bordi

**Specialties:** Hand lettering, banners, dimensional signage

**Location:** Merchantville, N.J.

**Years in Business:** 3

**E**VER CATCH those Saturday morning infomercials while you're casually clicking through television channels and become mesmerized by the featured gizmo or tool that is supposedly capable of slicing, dicing, sautéing and taking out the garbage in just a few easy steps? It all seems so fascinating, doesn't it? Imagine if the same scenario unfolded while describing a local sign artist in Commonplace, America.

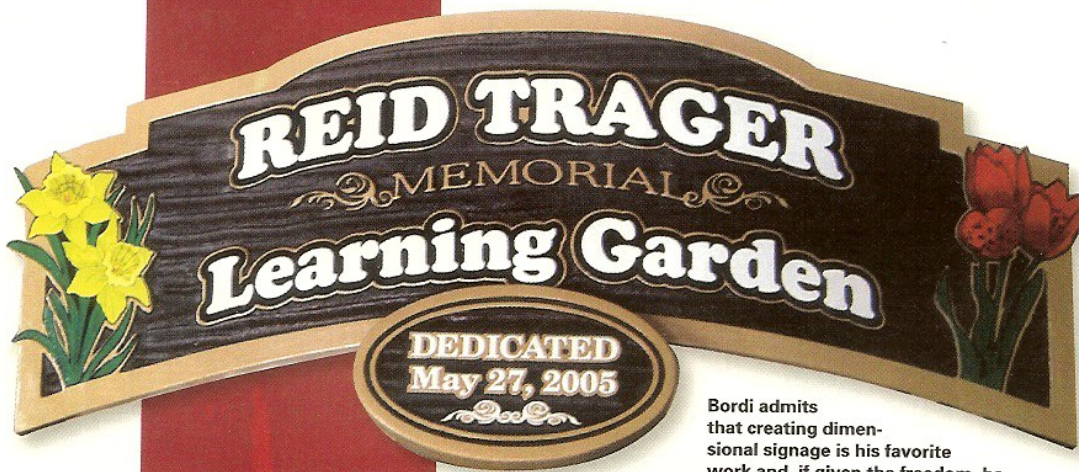
"Hold on to your hats ladies and gentlemen because this new addition to the all-in-one service market is sure to stir up some excitement. His name is Andy Bordi of Bordi Designs. He hand letters, pin stripes, sandblasts, digitally prints, and—the best part—he does it all himself.

"That's right folks, this one-man operation out of Merchantville, N.J. can print your banners, paint your store fronts, detail your vehicles and create your dimensional signage using just his talent and a few pieces of equipment."

At this point, the cheery television personality who is introducing our featured sign maker would pause briefly before releasing his teasing catch phrase. "But wait, there's more..."

## ONE MAN DOES IT ALL

The difference between the sales pitch above and Bordi's true capabilities as a sign maker is simply the fact that Bordi doesn't need a gimmick—his work speaks for itself. Cut away the infomercial reference and exposed is the driven, hard working and dedicated operation that is Bordi Designs. The



Bordi admits that creating dimensional signage is his favorite work and, if given the freedom, he will add dimension to projects by cutting or sandblasting.



Bordi will incorporate a self-designed logo into a sign if it fits. He believes working in CorelDRAW during the design process allows him to get more creative with his ideas.

shop has been running since 2003, however, Bordi has been involved with signs since his high school days.

"A friend of mine in high school worked at an auto shop and told me one day that they needed some signs," Bordi recalls in his bold East Coast accent. "I created some signs for them and made some money doing it. It was great, I got to draw and paint and cut stuff the way I wanted. I was hooked from then on."

Nowadays, Bordi doesn't need a formal delivery to gain new customers. The bulk of his business relies on word-of-mouth endorsement and referrals from past clients. And in a competitive Jersey market, that's saying something.

"There are quite a few shops in the area," says Bordi. "It's pretty stiff competition but I think I've got a good clientele and, with word-of-mouth promotion, I get my fair share of business."

Recently, Bordi was awarded a job with the store alliance of Hertz and Goodyear which collaborated to provide rental cars to individuals in need of automobile repairs. The project included developing store front and electrical signage for nine new locations locally. Though Bordi was excited about the new business, he admits it is much different working with larger, corporate clients.

"You're working with one guy who's dealing with 10 others," says Bordi, explaining that hand lettering projects, involving one-on-one conversations with the client instead of a chain of command, are sometimes more streamlined.

He should know. It was hand lettering that originally got Bordi started with signs.

#### THE INTRODUCTION

After Bordi's initial intrigue with the sign industry, he realized it would take

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Bordi designs store fronts for larger corporations, such as Hertz which requested signage for nine local stores. He subcontracted out the electrical portion.



Bordi created this project from 1 1/2" HDU, which was sandblasted by hand to add faux wood grain. The sign was painted with 1 shot, and the lettering was finished with SignGold.

time and effort to completely craft his skill. Though art had always been a passion of his, and he considered himself fairly talented, he wanted to develop himself into a successful, professional hand letterer.

"I was always artistic," says Bordi. "I was drawing all the time but I never really had a great outlet to make money."

That is until he hooked up with a local artist, Bruce "The Brush". Bruce worked mainly with pin striping and hit the race-car circuit with his artistry. He introduced Bordi to 1 Shot paint and shared helpful tips such as pounce patterns.

"He was a nice guy," Bordi recalls. "He gave me 10 to 15 minutes worth of lessons at a time then kicked me out of his shop to practice. It got me going in the right direction."

From there, Bordi further educated himself with books and magazines until he got a good feel for the industry. His brush led him to a steady workload as he traveled around the city forking his business cards over to local companies, looking to expand his client base.

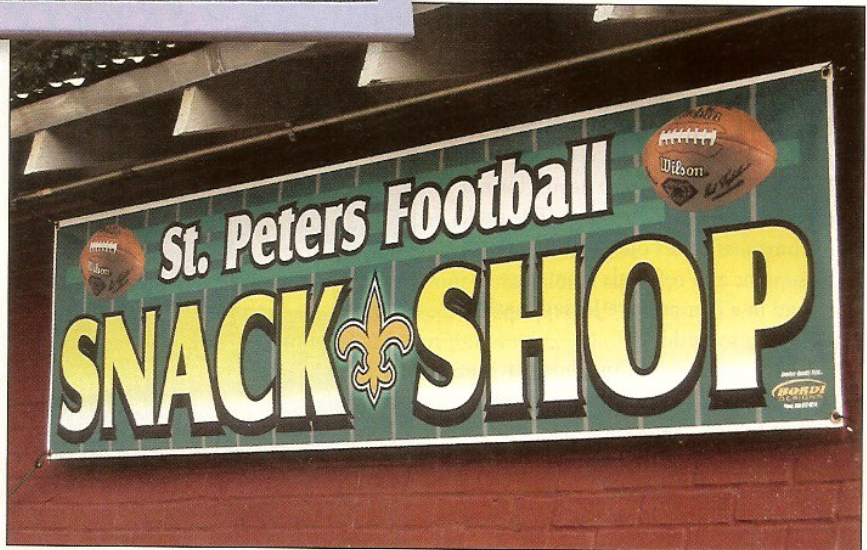
"I was getting enough work for a one man shop," says Bordi. "And it remained very hands-on."

But many resources were untapped with just a simple hand lettering shop, so

when Bordi became familiar with the latest technology and software, it opened up yet another door for him.

#### DID WE MENTION HE PRINTS?

"In the beginning, proposals and sketches were all hand drawn," Bordi explains as he describes his transition to the computer-aided program, CorelDRAW, that a friend introduced to him. "From there I started doing everything on the computer."



"I've been making a lot of banners," Bordi says. "It's been easy to do with the printer."



The Mutoh Falcon Outdoor Jr. has given Bordi the capability of entering a new market by printing on banners which he creates for local companies.

He also became more involved with the printing end of sign making, first purchasing a Summa 24" plotter, and then adding a Mutoh Falcon Outdoor Jr. to his collection. The new equipment allowed Bordi to extend more service to his clients, opening up additional markets for his work.

"I do a lot of banners now," Bordi says. "The Mutoh printer is amazing and I love it. It has made the workload a lot more manageable. Eventually I'd like to add a bigger one."

Bordi still hand letters when he gets a chance—he has some customers that request pin striping and airbrushing jobs—but, for the most part, he sticks with the Falcon Jr. to maintain workflow.

"I was limited with hand lettering," Bordi says, adding that most of his hand lettering is now done during spare time to keep in practice. "I can create many more effects with the printer and I have more imagery."

It seems he has more fun too. He has familiarized himself with the industry's methods and materials, preferring to use SignFoam and ORACAL vinyl on dimensional signage projects that have become some of his favorite work.

"I enjoy dimensional signs so I can get more hands on and more involved," Bordi says. "The product looks really good and the customer really appreciates the work."

Bordi recently completed a sandblasted dimensional sign for a local pizza place. He also designed a project for his client, Wellspring Counseling Center, using 1/2" thick, coupled layers of PVC that were digitally printed with graphics.

Says Bordi: "It was quick and fun to do and they were really happy with it."

#### NEW AND IMPROVED

All businesses must stay sharp to keep ahead of the competition. Bordi knows that. He has made significant strides to improve his business, yet he realizes more advances can still be made.

"I make mostly on-premise signs," Bordi says. "I'd like to get into more interior signage. There's a real need for that with corporate businesses."

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## SIGN PEOPLE

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The Wellspring Counseling Center sign was made using 1/2" thick, coupled layers of PVC that were digitally printed with graphics by the Mutoh Falcon Outdoor Jr. directly to the material.



"I don't do too much with auto detailing," says Bordi, though he will pinstripe or decorate an occasional vehicle using ORACAL cast vinyl.

(Right) The next step for Bordi is interior signage, which is in higher demand for more of his corporate clients.



His actions prove he's a go-getter but his attitude underlines contentment. For one, he doesn't aspire to take his business away from his familiar local market.

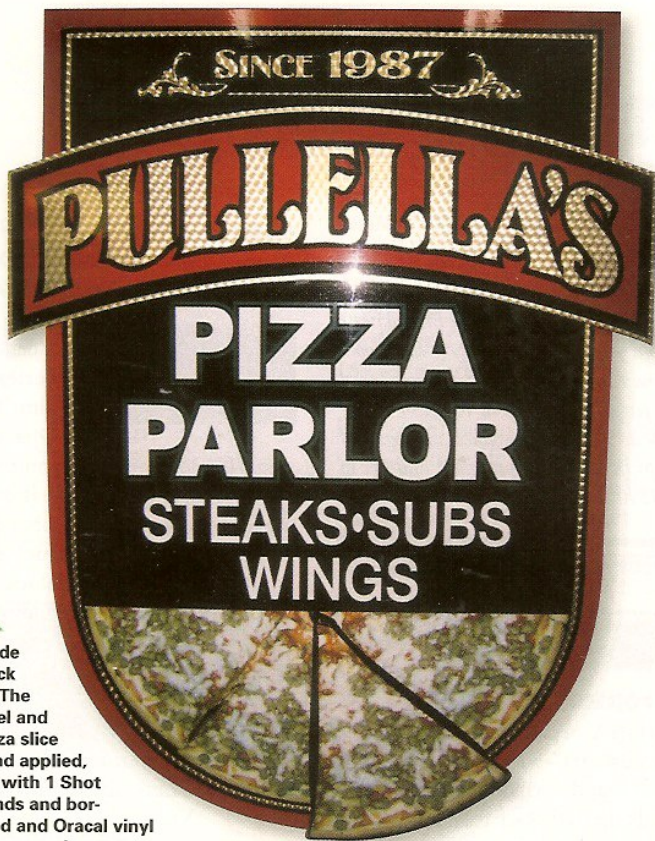
"I don't want to get too big," he says. "I might add another employee or two, and maybe open another location."

And can you blame him? Everything he's achieved has been self-provided and done independently, why stray from what's worked so well for this long? The real reason behind Bordi's smaller-scale plans is simply that he enjoys being involved too much to abandon his roll-up-the-sleeves-and-dig-in daily routine. With growth comes constant supervision and management, and Bordi knows that would take away from the hands-on approach that has built his current operation into a success.

"I'm pretty happy the way things are," Bordi says. "I don't know if I want to sit behind a desk all day and crunch numbers."

One has to admire the sign maker that just wants to make signs. That is essentially Bordi's practice. His dedication, commitment and excitement resonate through his work. His clients notice that, which is why they continue coming back to him.

Although it is easy to get wrapped up in a flashy sales proposal, remember, Bordi doesn't need the pitch to sell his work. Ask any of his clients and they'll be happy to lead you to his shop; he'll let his work do the talking.



This sign for a local pizza shop was made from 1/2" thick Lusterboard. The Pullella's panel and the offset pizza slice are cut out and applied, then finished with 1 Shot for backgrounds and borders. SignGold and Oracal vinyl were used for secondary copy.

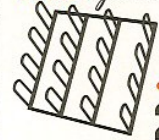


Bordi gains local work from new shops with referrals and word of mouth. He created this banner using his Mutoh Falcon Outdoor Jr.

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