

bursting with ideas

by josephine matyas
photography by tim forbes



NAME: *brenda scott*

BUSINESS: *creating personalized gift baskets*

INSPIRATION: *unearthing the passions of others*

"That first year we did about 60 baskets for Christmas. Now we do around a thousand. That's a lot of late nights."

If she wasn't already working for herself, Brenda Scott is the kind of person you would want on your team — a woman who sees a problem, takes a step back to consider the options, designs a solution, and then moves forward to make things happen. When the proverb "necessity is the mother of invention" was penned, it could easily have been written about Brenda Scott.

"In 1996, I was trying to have a bereavement basket sent to friends in Guelph. I knew exactly what I wanted, but I couldn't get anyone to do it. I knew that if I couldn't find what I wanted, then other people couldn't as well — so there must be a market. I kept saying to myself, 'I could do this,'" says the owner of a very busy gift-basket business that now designs, assembles and delivers more than 1,800 gift baskets each year.

And so she did, and Bursta Baskets was born.

The key to success — and the prudent business strategy — has been Scott's determined ability to "zero in on people's hobbies and their passions." This mover and shaker is driven by her own passion to unearth the passions of her basket recipients. "I love it. I really do love it," she smiles. "Everyone is so happy when they receive a gift basket."

No matter who the individual, what the event, any occasion, any time, anywhere — Scott has a container and all the goodies to go with it. Her company website shows some of the standard fare — baskets, tubs and pots — but that's just the tip of the iceberg. As the starting point for a custom gift basket, the type of container is only limited by the imagination. "As long as it has a cavity to fill, it can be used," laughs Scott. Her supply shelves are stacked with roasting pans, flower pots, colanders, popcorn bowls, toy boxes, toy dump trucks, gardener's aprons, umbrellas . . . the list goes on.

But the creative sparks really fly when the topic shifts to themes. For a price that ranges from \$25 to 20 times that amount (the average

gift basket is around \$40) Scott can dazzle any dog lover, horse-crazy teenager, homesick university student, bingo enthusiast, fisherman, gardener and golfer. And that's just for starters. Promotions or new jobs, retirements, sickness, bereavement, birthdays, births, good deeds, weddings and business or corporate events are also common reasons Scott is asked to create a basket of special recognition. "I can zero in on pretty well any theme you can think of," she says. Sometimes there is a run on themes. Scott recalls how the 2004-2005 NHL strike resulted in a spike in poker-themed baskets as people started visiting casinos in their spare time.

"I can zero in on any theme you can think of."

Twelve years ago, Scott was semi-retired when Bursta Baskets burst on to the scene (the business name is a play on words her son suggested). Business growth has been steady, and it wasn't long before the lure of the gift-basket world had Scott saying goodbye to her administrative job and hello to full-time entrepreneurship.

"We are steady year-round, but Christmas is our biggest season. That first year we did about 60 baskets for Christmas. Now we do around a thousand. That's a lot of late nights."

Although Kingston provides the lion's share of Bursta Baskets' market, the business creates custom gift baskets for clients across North America. As a member of an online gift-basket service (akin to a worldwide floral service) gift baskets can be arranged for delivery to anywhere around the globe.

Her unique talent in creating distinctive gift baskets has been a good experience for her customers and Scott, herself. "I think that when you have something unique it becomes a challenge, and I really enjoy a good challenge."

One can't help but think that someone needs to send Brenda Scott a gift basket to celebrate a job well done. **k**