

BUSINESS + TECHNOLOGY

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SMALL TALK

Small talk is an ongoing series that explores businesses with fewer than 25 employees and the methods they use to try to succeed.

Picture of health

PROFILE

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EMPLOYEES
6
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"Roundtree is not about creating an art gallery; rather, it understands and appreciates how art can aid in the healing process for patients in each distinct hospital unit."

—Michael Monaldo, John Muir Health



A pepper tree that was removed to make way for a parking lot lives on in art in the lobby at the John Muir Medical Center. Roundtree Visuals adds visuals to hospitals, restaurants and hotels that give the visitor an experience while simultaneously branding the company.

Roundtree Visuals consults with firms on artwork in public spaces

By David Morrill

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If you ask for directions at John Muir's new cardiovascular building in Concord, don't be surprised if someone says, "Turn right at the lovely photo of Mount Diablo."

That description would not be a coincidence. In the world of Deborah Roundtree and her art consulting firm, Roundtree Visuals Inc. in Emeryville, every image has a purpose.

With six full-time employees and 11 projects in the works, her job is to provide hospitality and health care organizations with a way to integrate artwork that helps to both brand the company and communicate something to its customers or patients.

"We want to make sure that within the first 10 feet they will get the feeling that the experience they'll have is very positive, Roundtree said."

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Small talk

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With revenues of more than \$686,000 in 2009 and growth expected to be about 100 percent in 2010, Roundtree Visuals is one of the fastest-growing private companies in the Bay Area.

Much like a housing contractor or a wedding planner coordinates all the pieces to make a project possible, Roundtree Visuals must add visuals to a hospital, restaurant or hotel that give the visitor an experience while simultaneously branding the company, and they have to bring in the necessary people to make it happen.

"Roundtree is not about creating an art gallery; rather, it understands and appreciates how art can aid in the healing process for patients in each distinct hospital unit," said Michael Monaldo, vice president of corporate real estate for John Muir Health. "The selections are well planned, well thought-out and well placed."

Often times, Roundtree is

on the construction sites of the projects wearing a hard hat, trying to visualize the space she will be working with.

"Before we decide on what kind of artwork to put in place, we want to understand the space, the flow of the corridors and the room sizes," she said.

A single project can take anywhere from a few months to a couple of years to complete.

Roundtree began her career as a freelance photographer, where she helped to create advertising campaigns for Fortune 500 clients such as American Express, Toyota, and Proctor and Gamble.

After her father died, Roundtree volunteered as a hospice worker for 14 years, which included training other volunteers. This is where she noticed how bland and uncomfortable many of the rooms were.

"I just saw lots of blank walls and blaring televisions," she said. "What I felt was needed was soothing artwork to relieve some of the stress."

It was then that one of her

mentors suggested she bring her expertise in advertising to a health-center setting. The result was the start of Roundtree Visuals.

Health care settings make up the majority of her projects, but recently she also has taken up hospitality projects such as hotels.

Roundtree uses as many local artists as she can to provide the look and feel that the client seeks.

Roundtree realizes that everybody has different tastes when it comes to art. For this reason, she relies on focus groups and studies to decide what type of art will work.

"We might personally love graphics, but for a group that needs help to support their healing, it might be too busy of a look," she said.

One of the unique trademarks of the firm is to incorporate digital images and technology into the artwork.

For example, at Saint John's Health Center in Santa Monica, Roundtree came up with the concept of an "ArtWall," which consists of 16 computer-controlled,



SUSAN TRIPP POLLARD/STAFF PHOTOS

"Monas" or "Oneness" is the title of this piece by San Francisco artist Linda Raynsford where Marcus Monaldo, 5, finds a cozy place to read as his mom Valerie Nagel sits on a nearby bench in a healing garden at John Muir Medical Center in Concord.

46-inch flat screen televisions displayed as a mosaic.

The clients are given access to software that allows them to change the images as they wish.

"Through an engaging art experience, the community is connected to the hospital and the hospital to the community," said Maura Winesburg, spokeswoman for Saint John's Health Center. "The methodology Deborah puts into what she does is amazing."

