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## Illinois spotlight shines bright on three local gems

By John Groh

We're celebrating at the RACVB these days over statewide recognition for three local gems with unique products and experiences that boost Rockford's growing status as a tourist destination.

The Illinois Department of Commerce's Office of Tourism named Rockford Roasting Company and MainFraiM as "Illinois Made Makers." They join the ranks of artisans, inventors, farmers and makers from around the state who help shape and reflect the culture of their communities. Rockford Art Deli made the list in 2016, when the program was launched.

In addition, the new "Travel Illinois" magazine features Anderson Gardens on the cover and inside the publication. This is Anderson Gardens' 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary year. Quality exposure like this bodes well for the region as we approach the peak travel summer season.

We asked the newly named Illinois Made Makers to share a few thoughts on their success for the benefit of other local businesses.

### **Mindboggling MainFraiM**

Jeremy Klonicki and Carmen Turner are business partners at MainFraiM, 3022 Wallin Ave., on Rockford's northwest side. They offer framing, specialty lighting and original design services.

Five other artists and craftspeople also work out of the 5,000-square-foot space. Walking through MainFraiM is, well, I can think of no other word than mindboggling. The high walls are lined with shelves that hold every manner of found, reclaimed or rescued item from days gone by. Fence posts, door knobs, glass bottles, springs, clocks, old lumber, doll heads, globes, piano keyboards. You name it, it's there.

Klonicki started the business seven years ago at another location. Besides doing framing, he created original artwork using found objects. Turner joined the business about a year in, and they figured out early on that they would be more successful by responding to customers' visions and creating unique pieces to meet specific needs.

"I'm always surprised when people say, 'Wow, that looks way better than I ever imagined it would!'" Klonicki said.

As a bonus, most creations come with a story. Turner can tell you the source of almost every item in the warehouse. What's next? The business continues to grow by word of mouth and repeat customers. "I might someday be able to outsource pulling nails or scraping tar," Turner joked, but both realize theirs is a hands-on business. Added Klonicki, "We get a lot of splinters."

### **Coffee Connects People**

Lucretia Ristin and Ben Chauvin of Rockford Roasting Company are committed to offering customers more than a good cup of coffee in downtown Rockford. Ristin owns the building at 206 N. Main Street and takes care of the financial and human resources end of the business. Chauvin, who began roasting beans on a small scale on a Weber grill in his back yard and selling to a handful of friends, runs the day-to-day operation.

The core business involves buying green coffee from all over the world and treating it with extreme care. Coffee characteristics differ, and Chauvin roasts carefully and evaluates constantly to bring out the best in every bean.

Ristin said she and Chauvin quickly discovered that a complex menu can be intimidating to some customers. “When we started out, we were a little cocky about coffee. After all, we know everything about coffee,” she said. “But there are people who just want cup of coffee that tastes good and they don’t care about how it was roasted. We get that now, and we do that.”

As for the atmosphere, Chauvin wanted to create a comfortable place for people to gather. “Coffee has a unique quality of connecting people,” he said. “They meet for coffee but they talk about life or business.”

The key to success – beyond a good cup of coffee – is good staff, Ristin said. “You have to treat them right, pay them well and listen to them if they have ideas. If you don’t have good employees, you are not going to succeed.”

To learn more about the Illinois Office of Tourism, to view a digital copy of the Travel Illinois Magazine and to read more about the Illinois Made program, visit [www.enjoyillinois.com](http://www.enjoyillinois.com), [www.enjoyillinois.com/illinoismade](http://www.enjoyillinois.com/illinoismade) or [www.facebook.com/enjoyillinois](http://www.facebook.com/enjoyillinois).

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