

November 15, 2007

## **Hyperion a worldwide endeavour**

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In the rear of a Rio industrial park lies a company whose operations stretch to Indonesia, and whose clients are among the rich.

Hyperion Imports has grown from a small wholesaler selling gift items from Indonesia into a manufacturer and supplier of custom doors, flooring and molding and a design consultant called upon by architects and builders around the world.

Jensen Beach couple Michael and Lisa Bell founded Hyperion in 1994. Michael was selling real estate and Lisa was a flight attendant. Married just two years, the couple visited Southeast Asia, where they fell in love with the people, culture and surf of Indonesia.

A native Hawaiian, Mike was well acquainted with the import business and Indonesian works of art.

"The craftsmanship there is phenomenal, and they have a wealth of raw materials." Mike said.

The couple began merchandising Indonesian crafts from their garage to Stuart retailers. Mike continued selling real estate and Lisa flew with Delta Air Lines.

"When we started, \$200 was a big sale," Mike recalled.

Within a year, the business was profitable enough to support him full time. They expanded sales to West Palm Beach, Miami, and Orlando, and the business outgrew the garage. The company moved into rented storage space and then, in 1997, to the present location. Even that has been expanded, from one 1,500-square-foot space to three covering 5,000 square feet.

Also in 1997, Hyperion jumped into handcrafted building materials, starting with custom doors made at an Indonesian factory. The company added other architectural products in 2001, custom flooring and molding in 2003, and flooring made from palm wood in 2004.

As Hyperion grew, the Bells invested in the factory that supplied them. Eventually, the couple became the owners.

Today, the company has 60 employees in one factory and 11 in another working in three shifts. Among the workers are 11 artists.

Mike points out that the wood, doors and flooring all must be precisely cut and trimmed. He credits his Indonesian workers' great skills.

"Designers know that our niche is custom design, which many companies don't offer," Lisa said. "Our materials are unique and our products are 'out of the box.'"

Hyperion's factories make countertops out of coconut shells and cinnamon, and flooring out of palm wood. Customers want exotic products, such as hand-carved wood and green stones found only in Indonesia. Mike said such work would be expensive to produce in the United States. Even with shipping costs, the Indonesian products are cheaper.

The Bells have learned on the job. When their first shipments of wood from Indonesia arrived with cracks, for example, they quickly learned to

pick just the right kind of wood and to kiln dry it to eliminate moisture. They also invested in sophisticated equipment.

Mike and Lisa also take pride in their environmental consciousness.

"We buy only legal logs that are 'certified' in areas where the government enforces certain criteria on the size and the age and how many you can take from any one place," Lisa said. "We use a lot of palm wood for our projects because palm trees are plentiful in Indonesia and only take 15 years to grow."

In recent years, Hyperion has become more than a supplier to builders. Mike provides design consultation and project management for tropical home designers in far-flung areas as Australia, Bali, the Bahamas and Belize.

The Bells credit well-known, Bali-based architect and designer Made Wijaya with opening these opportunities by inviting Mike to participate in his projects.

Hyperion has also done well on the Treasure Coast. Hyperion was averaging at least three local clients each month, but with his real estate background, Mike foresaw the current real estate slump. While their U.S. business has dropped off dramatically, their foreign business has tripled. It is only within the last month that business has started to pick up locally with the return of snowbirds.

Mike and Lisa have just finished a major local project, the new home of Rufus and Melynda Wakeman on the St. Lucie River not far from Hyperion's headquarters. The company supplied 10,000 square feet of flooring, 40 doors, stairs with hand-carved railings, and custom inlaid counter tops with cinnamon bark.

Mike said the referrals from that project have been very positive. Much of Hyperion's work comes from word-of-mouth recommendations through designers, architects and builders.

Hyperion projects have also been featured in six home and architectural magazines.

While the business is 13 years old, Mike and Lisa have known each other for 40 years. Their parents were best friends and next-door neighbors in Hawaii. Mike, 53, and his sister babysat Lisa, now 43, when she was a pre-schooler.

After Mike's mother moved to Jensen Beach in 1991, Lisa accompanied her mother on a visit and renewed acquaintances with Mike. Now, 15 years later, they are the proud parents of two daughters, ages 12 and 10, and are planning a move halfway around the world to Bali, where they are building a house. Mike and both girls speak Indonesian.

Mike emphasizes that he and Lisa will remain connected to their Rio operations through a manager, a sales representative and regular visits. Mike says he has spent too many hours in management, especially on travel, and looks forward to handing off those duties.

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