

# Designer's Profile

By Judi Kauffman

## Julie Burns: Smart Energy



Although we have not yet met in person, it's easy to feel Julie Burns' energy and enthusiasm bursting through the phone line. I

like how she focused on our conversation, giving thoughtful and thorough answers to all of my questions, while at the same time taking brief breaks now and then to handle questions from staff and customers. I could hear her giving each of them her full attention—same as she was giving me. It's a little like an air traffic controller who knows exactly where everything is on a radar screen—hard and intense work handled in a seemingly effortless way.

Julie Burns has spent a lifetime building the skills it takes to simultaneously run more than one business, raise a family, breed and show dogs, and design products. But she repeatedly credits others for making it possible, which is very much the mark of a kind and thoughtful person and a good

leader. For example, when Julie talked about designing rug patterns she mentioned the names of the people she relies on for help with color choices, carefully spelling their names so I can give them credit. She also remarked how lucky she is to have staffs at her two stores that are full of the best people anywhere, ever.

As we talked about the way her life unfolded, Julie mentioned that as an only child she had to be creative because there weren't always playmates handy. She loved to read and play with dolls and paper dolls. She wasn't artistic, didn't draw or sketch, but she does admit to making random doodles when she's on the phone. Julie's vision is in her head, a visual thinker who uses her verbal skills to bring her ideas to life.

Julie's first career was accidental. When her first son went off to school, she took a job as a legal secretary. On the side, she sold painted wooden items, the kind of popular crafty snowmen and witches on stakes that were popular at the time. Twenty years passed quickly. In this time, Julie had two more sons and continued working in law offices, but she always wanted to



work for herself and liked the idea of owning a business. In 1998 she rented a space and opened a store called *Trinkets & Treasures* in Washington on the Square in Washington, Illinois. For a short while the items she sold were those she found and bought, but soon she sought out craftspeople and artists, renting booths in the bright and fresh new space she had made from what was previously a dark warren of small rooms. She was and remains "picky," bringing in only those people who do high quality work.

When a space went up for sale two doors from *Trinkets & Treasures*, Julie and her fiancé Pat Murphy bought the building. Though she intended to rent out the space for two years while she worked out the details of what she wanted to sell, the tenant's business failed and Julie changed her schedule, opening *Among Friends* three years ago to sell upscale handmade items. These items now include patterns, penny rugs, hooked rugs, kits, books, homespun fabrics and flannels, punch needle and penny rug patterns and kits, wool on the bolt, dyed wool by the fat quarter, Flax clothing, reproduction furniture, Carol Endres candles (and by special order, Carol Endres wallpaper) as well as handmade tin lamps, finished stitcheries, and coverlets. The store drew its name from three little girls in a vintage photo that is on the business card. Though the picture is not of them, it represents Julie plus Mary Jo and Brenda, two friends who taught her how to hook and worked to decorate the store.

In the midst of all of this, Julie became hooked on rug hooking, traveling to camps and classes every chance she could get to pursue her love of the art. Between hooking every night and running the two stores, Julie also made time to renovate her home, adding a room and a deck especially for the

**Among Friends offers a variety of upscale, handmade treasures.**

