

Business



Dan Coyro/Sentinel

Lynn Barone of Salamander displays Olympics souvenirs.

Watsonville firm to sell souvenirs for 1996 Olympics

By STEVE PEREZ
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WATSONVILLE — When the 100th Olympic games begin next summer in Atlanta, some of the finer souvenirs will bear a local imprint.

Salamander Co. of Watsonville is one of 115 companies across the nation that have been granted licenses to market merchandise associated with the summer Olympics.

The 24-year-old company has fashioned a distinctive umbrella and tote bag bearing the logos of past games to offer retailers seeking a piece of the Atlanta Centennial Olympics.

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Bill Brady, president and CEO of the 50-employee firm, said his company was approached by Atlanta Centennial Olympic Properties, or ACOP, the marketing arm of the Atlanta Committee for the Olympic Games.

Selling exclusive rights so that businesses can attach their name in some way to the games is a way local committees try to recoup the cost of hosting the event.

Such licenses, for which Salamander paid \$50,000, have been sold to companies ranging from Anheuser-Busch to Zippo Manufacturing.

"They liked our style of umbrellas," Brady said Tuesday. "The line of umbrellas we make is real unusual."

It's the artwork — applied using a heat transfer process that Brady coyly declines to detail — that sets them apart.

The company affixes colorful reproductions of classic paintings by artists, such as French Impressionist Claude Monet's "Woman With Umbrella" to a durable polyester fabric, creating a product that's a unique combination of form and function. The umbrellas are manufactured in Taipei, Taiwan.

The Art Institute of Chicago sells thousands each year, Brady said.

Salamander's reputation was one of the reasons Atlanta representatives sought them out, according to Fran Vetter, ACOP's senior program director. The company also provides licensed products to the National Football League and Major League Baseball.

"We are quite familiar with their capabilities," Vetter said in a telephone interview from Atlanta. "We were looking for companies with proven sales, a quality product and national distribution."

Under the agreement, the companies pay a licensing fee up front — a minimum guarantee based on sales estimates — along with a percentage of actual sales.

The ACOP said sales of such licensed products had reached \$250 million as of Aug. 28, more than four times the total licensing revenue of the '84 games in Los Angeles, and twice those of the '92 Olympics in Barcelona.

The ACOG is projecting total retail sales of \$1.5 billion.

"It's quite an honor to be chosen," Brady said.

His company also has worked out a deal to create an Olympics umbrella for BMW Motorworks.

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The company hasn't experienced a great demand yet for the products outside of the Atlanta area, he said.

Brady said he expects the sales of the Olympic umbrellas, which also include a silk-screened version bearing only the logo of the Atlanta games, to amount to less than 10 percent of his annual sales.

Brady expects retailers to price them at \$16-\$36.

But Vetter, in Atlanta, said there could be quite a demand for the umbrellas, especially during the games.

"It rains a lot here in the summer," she said. "Especially in July and August. It'll rain here for a few minutes, then stop."