



## Greeting card designer finds niche market, growing demand

By: **MELISSA HAYES** (Sun, Feb/10/2008)

WILLINGBORO — Walk down the greeting-card aisle at the new CVS Pharmacy on Route 130 and you'll come across a rack of cards designed by a former township resident.

John Erving started designing greeting cards 13 years ago after the company he worked for was purchased and moved him from an outside sales position to a desk job.

"I always thought about going into business myself," he said.

So Erving, who had sales experience in the greeting card industry from a prior job, did some research.

"I found out there was a need for quality black greeting cards," he said.

He bought some books on sketching and painting, started attending trade shows and recruited his wife, Margaret, to write some of the verses that appear inside the cards.

Erving started JonMar Creations as a line of 32 greeting cards primarily sold at Lomas Pharmacy in Willingboro and a few Thriftway Supermarkets.

When CVS purchased Lomas, he began lobbying the company to continue carrying his cards. CVS agreed to sell his cards at 20 of its stores during Christmas. The cards sold out and he approached the chain store about selling his cards for other occasions. Now Erving's cards can be found in 50 CVS stores in New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania, including stores in Pemberton and Westampton.

In addition, several Pathmarks, including the store on Route 130 in Edgewater Park, carry his cards.

Erving's line has grown from 32 to 200 cards. He paints about half of the images on the cards himself. He also hires artists like Cal Massey of Moorestown and Ben Jefferson of Philadelphia to design his cards.

"The more time that passes by, it seems like the fewer I'm doing," Erving said. "I can't get in the studio."

Erving said the demand has grown to the point that he has hired merchandisers to make sure the store shelves stay stocked. He has also become a distributor for other black greeting card designers and sells their cards alongside his own.

"I realized I couldn't make enough cards to meet the need," he said.

Erving has a warehouse in Riverside, but he and his wife were still in need of space to store all of the cards. "We even had an extra room put on the house there in Willingboro for the cards," his wife said.

A little over a year ago, they left Willingboro and moved into a larger home in Lawnside, Camden County.

Erving said it's hard to believe how much his company has grown.

"I look at the first set of cards we did — the 32 cards — and I wonder how we got started," he said.

He recently received one of his own cards from a friend. He said it isn't the first time someone has sent him a card he created.

"It's a good feeling," he said. "You know somebody's out there buying them and it's working."

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