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## **Two Prominent Interior Design Trade Showrooms Join Forces**

**The John Widdicomb Trade Center and Michigan Design Resources partner up to create a one-stop resource to better serve the interior design trade.**

The John Widdicomb Trade Center (JWTC) and Michigan Design Resources (MDR) share so much in common, a partnership between the two vendor-supported wholesale design showrooms might seem almost inevitable. Both firms recognized an unmet need for serving the interior design trade in West Michigan, and they each saw it at virtually the same time; both MDR and The Widdicomb Center opened their doors within a month of each other. The two companies were even located within a few blocks of each other on Grand Rapids' West Side.

Now, these two firms have decided on a partnership that will consolidate their resources at the JWTC showroom at 601 5th Street, NW. As a result, the John Widdicomb Trade Center -- already one of the largest centers catering to the interior design trade in the Midwest, with over 115,000 square feet of furniture and other resources -- will gain additional employees, customers, and resources that will allow it to further expand its sales and client base.

"It became clear to both of us that our companies were a perfect fit for each other," says David Israels, President of JWTC. "We both had our greatest strengths in different areas." For instance, MDR specialized in textiles. They offered a very broad selection of fabrics from all the major lines, and their people were experts; MDR's President, Kathy Rautiola, has taught classes in textiles at the Kendall School of Design. Meanwhile, the Widdicomb Center had placed their greatest concentration on furniture and interior design. As a much larger company, Widdicomb also offered services that the smaller MDR couldn't economically duplicate. "To be able to properly support designers, you must have the resources to do the job properly," MDR's Rautiola explains. "And the JWTC has it all. From their range of different lines and huge inventory, to warehousing, delivery, and after-sales support, they provide a level of full service that we just couldn't supply on our own."

So for both companies, the prospect of a partnership simply made sense, especially in the current economic

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climate. “While our people and specializations complimented each other, our operations and efforts duplicated each other,” Israels says. “The cost of maintaining separate showrooms, inventories, staffs, services, and overheads wasn’t benefiting anyone – it was just adding costs we’d have to pass on to our clients. We are in a market where we have to be efficient, for everyone’s sake, whether it’s our vendors, ourselves, our designer clients, or their customers.”

The principals at the two firms see huge benefits that go beyond the economic efficiencies of the combined operation. “In this business, people and relationships are a critical element,” Israels points out. “Over the years, at MDR and other places such as J.T French, Kathy and her staff have built an incredible level of trust and respect. Their relationships with vendors, designers and clients go beyond the professional. They’ve forged friendships with these people, and that’s something that no amount of money could buy. Through this partnership, they bring us together with these very satisfied parties, which will help us grow many aspects of our business.” In response to the opportunities created by this partnership, JWTC is expanding the size and number of the services it offers – and adding new employees in the process. “This partnership truly makes us a full-service resource that can meet the needs of anyone in the interior design trade,” Israels says.

Rautiola sees just as many benefits for MDR’s customers. “We can offer them so much more, now that we’ve partnered with a powerhouse like JWTC. We’ll still provide them with everything we’ve always had available. But now they’ll also be able to choose from far larger selection of furnishings and services. Plus, they’ll benefit from all the skills, experience and enthusiasm the staff at JWTC bring to their jobs. And, being part of the John Widdicomb Center introduces us to a whole new group of designers and clients. We see this partnership as a win-win situation for everyone: us, Widdicomb, and most importantly, all of our customers.”

One such customer is Kim Waltman, who has been an interior designer in West Michigan for over 30 years. She’s been a client of both JWTC and MDR, and has worked with Israels and Rautiola for decades. “When I found out about the partnership, I was so excited,” she says. “I think this is the perfect marriage. To have all these resources in one location means designers like me won’t have to go all over town. It’ll make our jobs so much easier. The people at both companies are very customer oriented, and they really get the job done. They’re the best of the best. In my opinion, you couldn’t put together a better package of people and products.”

The two companies are already in the process of consolidating their operations. Over the next few weeks, a pair of sales will be held at MDR’s former showroom at 801 Broadway NW. While the first sale is exclusively for the design trade, a second sale, beginning Thursday April 9, will be open to the general public.

David Israels believes the partnership has great potential for the future. “It will make us stronger, smarter, and more competitive,” he says. “With more resources and experts under one roof, we’ll be in a better position to compete outside our core West Michigan marketplace. In the past years, we’ve been able to attract new clients to Grand Rapids that had previously gone to Detroit or Chicago. With this new partnership, I believe we’ll be drawing even more business to West Michigan.”