

Best kept secret of Carrboro picks local marketing firm The Splinter Group for upcoming town branding

By Brian Walker, Carrboro Commons Staff Writer

Carrboro may not be the Triangle's best-kept secret for much longer. After a six-month long selection process the town has selected Carrboro-based marketing firm The Splinter Group to help with its new branding and marketing campaign.

"Carrboro has a pulse, an image, a personality, and the world doesn't know about it until they stumble on it because they've come to Chapel Hill," Terri Turner, chair of Carrboro's Economic Sustainability Commission, said. This group was appointed to recommend a firm to help with the project. "We want to own what we are and shape how the world sees us a little bit," Turner continued.

"We're excited," Splinter Group co-founder Lane Wurster said. "We know the audience, we know the product because we've been here for 20 years in terms of being part of the creative community.... we felt like we had the inside track on what would be a good fit."

The firm was born in 2000 out of the ashes of Mammoth Records, a local record label best known for platinum-selling artists The Squirrel Nut Zippers. Wurster and Splinter Group co-founder Steve Baucom worked at Mammoth Records as creative director and general manager, respectively.

"When Mammoth was sort of crumbling and we were trying to figure out what was next, we thought, we're already kind of an advertising and marketing company, we've just been doing it for music; I bet we could do it for other businesses who would like a less traditional approach to how they're portrayed and marketed," Wurster said.

The firm started off in Durham but moved to Carrboro shortly thereafter to be closer to where Wurster and Baucom lived.

Since its inception, The Splinter Group has worked with many of Carrboro and Chapel Hill's leading businesses and organizations including



Lane Wurster (foreground) and Steve Baucom, co-founders of The Splinter Group, in Carrboro. (Staff photo by Brian Walker)

Weaver Street Market, Cat's Cradle, The Artscenter, Carolina Brewery and The Ackland Art Museum, as well as a host of other regional and national clients.

Wurster said this on-the-ground experience was an important factor when Carrboro was looking for a firm to help with their branding and marketing campaign.

"I think one of selling points was we're sort of already doing this in a more organic way. The entertainment, the food, the

farms, the retail and the arts; those things that were going to be core to the way (the town) was going to brand -- we're already working with those people. We talk to those people on a regular basis."

Turner agreed and said that although there were other local firms who submitted impressive proposals, in the end The Splinter Group seemed like a natural fit.

"How could you not pick them? They're qualified, they're award-winning, and they're in Carrboro," Turner said.

But Turner said it won't be an easy job for the group.

"They're going to have their work

cut out for them to make sure they cast a really wide net at the front end to get feedback from the community," Turner said. "(Carrboro) is not just people drinking coffee across the street, there's a lot more to this town that lives under the surface.... What I would hate to have happen is all this energy is put into it and then the community feels like they didn't have a voice in what it ends up being."

Both Baucom and Wurster said they're aware of the potential pitfalls such a project has in a town like Carrboro.

"The thing that makes Carrboro cool is almost a lack of a brand," Wurster said. "For a branding campaign or a marketing campaign to work in Carrboro it will have to be embraced by (Carrboro residents) Kirk Ross, by Trish and Ron and Mark Chilton, it will have to be the kind of thing people think is cool enough to participate in."

"This is the kind of community that has a really great B.S. detector," Wurster said. "You can tell when something is not genuine in this area really quickly."

Branding for the indies
The task of branding the "cool" town of Carrboro, which almost thrives on its lack of branding, will be a tough one for The Splinter Group.

Check out The Splinter Group's work at <http://www.thesplinter-group.net/>