

Distinctive Gardens of Dixon, IL: finalist for the Big Break for Small Business!

Top 10 finalist in country from one of smallest towns competing for Facebook American Express OPEN Big Break for Small Business

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Contact: Bud LeFevre, cell: 815.440.0813; work: 815.285.0014, email: distinctivegardens@comcast.net
Lisa Higby LeFevre, cell: 815.535.7325
Facebook & American Express contacts, *please see below*

Summary: Distinctive Gardens of Dixon, IL makes the Top 10 in country from over 11,000 small businesses competing for the Facebook American Express OPEN Big Break for Small Business competition. Distinctive Gardens from Dixon, IL, pop. 16,000, competes against businesses in large cities such as L.A., Chicago, and NYC.

We need your vote!



facebook.com/ShopSmall

DIXON, IL –Like never before, social media can help small businesses like, Distinctive Gardens reach more customers. That's why American Express OPEN is teaming up with Facebook to give five small businesses a Big Break—a trip to Facebook headquarters for a two-day, one-on-one business makeover and \$20K to help grow their business with social media.

Over 11,000 businesses entered, and Distinctive Gardens from Dixon, IL has been chosen as one of the 10 finalists. From the small town of Dixon, IL, (pop. 16,000), Distinctive Gardens competes against businesses in large cities such as L.A., Chicago, and NYC. This teeny little business from a wee little town is looking for a big break!

Now it's up to you—help us be one of the 5 Big Break winners! Cast your vote for Distinctive Gardens to win the Big Break.

Voting runs from July 5, 2011 through July 19, 2011 on facebook.com/ShopSmall. The five businesses with the most votes will win, so be sure to go there and vote!

We are proud to represent our community and need your help get to the next level. Vote for us by July 19th. We really appreciate your support!

Vote now at facebook.com/ShopSmall.

Voting Rules apply. Available at facebook.com/ShopSmall.

DISTINCTIVE GARDENS

We love gardening, no two ways around it. We love gardeners. They are the coolest, most open-minded and passionate people around. We love this industry. These people are honest, enthusiastic, and love sharing the knowledge and joy of their efforts. We do this business because it's a fantastic way to meet great people and share our passion for plants, gardening, and community.

Please indulge us as we offer you a little tour. First off, we opened in the spring of 1999. On 7.5 acres, stands a 100-year-old barn housing a creative gift gallery with work by local artists. Next, we have our greenhouses. They keep us happy even when the weather outside is less than desirable. Here you find collectible conifers, deciduous plants, unusual annuals, perennials, and vegetables. Venture outside to find glorious display beds. We garden while at work to show off favorite finds and creative ideas. Moving along, our landscape design, installation, and maintenance services, just another great way to meet new friends and share in the love of gardening. Further along, on the grounds is a rentable pavilion, home to our two, yearly, benefit festivals.

Finally, no gardener worth his salt is anything if not community minded. In step with our customers, we strive to be good neighbors, seeding our community with the same love it shows us. For this, Chilifest benefits the monthly community art event, Second Saturdays. And, Gardenstock Art & Music Festival raises money for the Youth Gardening Program over at Sinnissippi Centers, a community based behavioral healthcare center. But, we're not done yet. We have our hands in on a couple more community projects. For The Crystal Cork Art Quarterly and Second Saturdays Art Happenings we partner with area businesses and local artists to expand art and culture in our community. These activities, among others, are our way of paying it forward.

None of this would be possible without you. You, our loyal customers, foster means for us to pay it forward. Importantly, the business itself would not even exist without your patronage. You, our gardening friends, the cool people we've met through the years, make Distinctive Gardens. From your kind vote of confidence, we can grow, improving on the basics and expanding community efforts. Our hat's off to you. Welcome to Distinctive Gardens, a unique garden lover's delight growing plants, friendship and community, one seed at a time.

DISTINCTIVE GARDENS COMPETITION TIMELINE

The competition consists of three phases: a written submission, oral interview, and public vote at Facebook.com/ShopSmall on their favorite 5 small businesses from the top ten finalists.

The experience started over two months ago for Distinctive Gardens. On April 22, Facebook page, "SocialPie", a social media information site posts a link to the Big Break competition. The next day, Distinctive Gardens, co-owner, Lisa Higby LeFevre enters the first phase of competition answering three questions: 1. Tell us about your business. What makes you excited to come to work every day? 2. How do you envision Facebook impacting your business? 3. How could a Big Break help your business and your customers?

A month later, on May 25, a call comes to the shop announcing Distinctive Gardens is a top 40 semi-finalist from over 11,000 entries across the country. That night, co-owner, Bud LeFevre receives a call on his cell, right before he was to head into the grocery store. Sitting in the front seat of his van, a storm was erupting outside making it tough to hear. On the other end, Cynthia Spaulding from Electric Artists in NYC and representative for Facebook American Express OPEN Big Break conducts a phone interview, the second phase of competition. Both written and oral submissions go to a panel of judges that include representatives from AMEX and Facebook, and Guy Kawasaki of Alltop and John Battelle of Federated Media. The panel judges applicants based on the following criteria.

- Entrant's commitment to his/her own business growth
- Overall social media need where Facebook could improve their business
- Energy and enthusiasm for his/her small business

A week later, on June 2, a call comes from Tom Monahan of American Express OPEN announcing Distinctive Gardens is a top 10 finalist.

States Bud LeFevre,

"We were so overwhelmed and excited we could hardly believe what just happened."

During the subsequent days, Jonathan Creech from Digitas, an integrated brand agency out of New York, contacts Bud and Lisa to arrange the video shoot.

Orchestrated by Digitas, on June 10, a camera crew of people from Boston, NYC, LA, and Chicago converge on Distinctive Gardens. Also in attendance, Facebook, Global Customer Marketing & Communications Team, Manager, Lauryn Hale, and American Express, Interactive Marketing and Consumer Cards, Senior Manager, Michael Chao. Under the direction of producer Jerry Izzo, the team spends an entire day shooting and interviewing to make a short video for the third phase of the Big Break competition. Team members include: Director – Casey Suchan; Camera - Leif Johnson, Camera - Nate Carrington, Sound - Michael Baum, and Production Asst - Kristyna Archer.

States Lisa Higby LeFevre,

"It was the most exhilarating and exhausting day I ever experienced."

We spent an entire day pouring our hearts out to the video team, answering their questions and explaining why we love doing this business and how thankful we are to be doing it in the community of Dixon, IL. They were fantastic and we had a lot of fun.”

On July 5, Facebook and American Express OPEN launch public voting on the top 10 videos to determine the top 5 winners. Facebook users vote for their five favorite small businesses at the American Express OPEN Facebook page: www.facebook.com/ShopSmall.

States Bud,

“The national exposure from Big Break is huge for this little business. Even if we go no further in the competition we’ve already won.”

In August, the top 5 winners fly out to Facebook headquarters in Palo Alto, CA for a two-day, intensive, one-on-one Facebook training session. The documented sessions will appear on OPEN’s Facebook Page and OPEN Forum as well as being available in the form of “How To” videos where Facebook answers small business owner questions on how to effectively market on Facebook.

DISTINCTIVE GARDENS WRITTEN SUBMISSION

Q1. Tell us about your business. What makes you excited to come to work every day?

A1. We love gardening, no two ways around it. We love gardeners. They’re the coolest, most open-minded people around. We love our industry. These people are honest, enthusiastic, and love sharing knowledge and the joy of their efforts. We feel lucky doing a job we love. We opened this garden center because it’s a fantastic way to meet like-minded people, and share in our passion for plants, gardening, and community. No gardener (nor garden center) worth their salt is anything if not community-minded. Like our customers, we strive to be good neighbors, seeding our community with the same love it shows us. We hold benefit festivals, like Gardenstock; teach a slew of first graders on yearly field trips (what a trip); and partner with local businesses and artists expanding art and culture in our town. We’re a garden lover’s delight growing plants, friendship and community, one seed at a time.

Q2. How do you envision Facebook impacting your business?

A2. Facebook has revolutionized the way we communicate with our customers and community. In 2009, we started the Distinctive Gardens page, followed by Gardenstock Art & Music Festival, and community project pages: Crystal Cork Art Quarterly, and Second Saturdays Art Happenings. Seeing results, in 2010, we integrated “like” buttons and “news feeds” into our website to keep fresh and increase connectivity. In our industry, it’s all about creating one on one connection and meaningful experiences. Facebook offers us “little guys” some “big guy” tools for reaching our audience. It’s our primary platform for customer conversation outside the physical business. For community projects its indispensable. We get the word out and organize large events monthly. Our little downtown is getting the reputation as an “art town”. Facebook connections are driving that change. We want knowledge to further integrate Facebook into communication and online selling activities, customize our page, and enhance community projects.

Q3. How could a Big Break help your business and your customers?

A3. \$20K is an enormous capital influx for our business. It would take us to the next social media and technological level. Currently, we are looking into selling online. We want our website to be a hub of knowledge, selling platform, and social interaction place, a gathering spot bringing people together.

Socially enhanced, we want it to be an extension of our store and community projects. We want our customers to walk into the greenhouse, click on a QR code, access additional horticultural information, and share it with their Facebook friends. Last year, we hung posters with QR codes at Gardenstock so concert goers could connect to Gardenstock's Facebook page and communicate during the festival. This year we want to extend that by projecting the page live on a big screen. We want the knowledge to take these ideas further. A Facebook makeover gives us the information to make that happen.

CONDENSED TIME LINE

April 22 ~ "SocialPie" Facebook page posts a link to the Big Break competition.

April 23 ~ Distinctive Gardens enters the first phase of competition with a written submission answering three questions.

May 25 ~ A call comes informing Distinctive Gardens is a top 40 semi-finalist from over 11,000 entries across the country. Later that night a phone interview is conducted. Both the written and oral submissions then go to a panel of three judges who decide the top 10.

June 2 ~ A call comes informing Distinctive Gardens is a top 10 finalist.

June 10 ~ A camera crew of people from Boston, NYC, LA, and Chicago converge on Distinctive Gardens and spend an entire day shooting and interviewing to make a 90 second video for the competition.

July 5 ~ Facebook and American Express OPEN launch public voting on the top 10 videos to determine the top 5 winners.

MORE INFORMATION / FACEBOOK & AMERICAN EXPRESS CONTACTS:

Big Break Competition:

Cynthia Spaulding of Electric Artists, email: CynthiaS@electricartists.com

Facebook:

www.facebook.com/ShopSmall or www.facebook.com/OPEN

Lauryn Hale, Manager, Global Customer Marketing & Communications Team

email: lauryn.hale@fb.com, mobile: 650.681.7202

American Express OPEN:

www.openforum.com or

www.openforum.com/idea-hub/topics/marketing/video/facebook-big-break-for-small-business

American Express:

Michael Chao, Senior Manager, Interactive Marketing, Consumer Cards

email: Michael.chao@aexp.com, tel: 212.640.5275

Distinctive Gardens:

www.distinctivegardensinc.com,

2020 Lowell Park Road, Dixon, IL, 815.285.0014, distinctivegardens@comcast.net

Owners:

Bud LeFevre, cell: 815.440.0813

Lisa Higby LeFevre, cell: 815.535.7325

James Brown, cell: 815.994.1225