

SIDELINES

UNABASHEDLY PRO-FUN

Pin-back buttons are more than a century old, yet you can trace the medium's latest advances to Chicago, home of Busy Beaver Button Company. Since 1995, Christen Carter's dream of resurrecting the one-inch punk rock button has grown from a one-woman shop to a bustling creative hub with an inventive spirit, an appreciation for history and the desire to give back.

From the start, Busy Beaver has been as industrious as its namesake, overseeing more than 50,000 unique designs. The team produces an average of 3 million buttons a year for an impressive client roster, including Bumble and bumble, Threadless, Burger King and Missy Elliot—not to mention countless other artists, nonprofits and small businesses.

These clients demand more than just buttons; they want innovation. The metallic buttons grew from one customer's need. So did their wooden buttons. Busy Beaver was the first to offer one-inch-square and 24-karat gold-plated buttons. The headquarters is even home to the world's largest button vending machine.

Busy Beaver's creativity transcends buttons. Employees moonlight as painters, musicians, writers, videographers and puppet-makers. And this culture of extracurricular ingenuity is no accident. "Creativity allows us to better serve the customer," Carter says. "No matter how crazy the idea, we'll brainstorm and help make it happen. We love innovative projects, and I think our customers really appreciate it."

Another of Carter's goals is to promote environmental stewardship. "We want buttons to be around as long as humans," she says. "So we work to be as sustainable as possible." This means eco-friendly insulation, recycled-tire flooring, geothermal heating and cooling and solar panels for the office. Every button includes recycled local steel, and customers also have the option of requesting 100% recycled paper.

Busy Beaver is active in the community, supporting nonprofits, hosting button-making workshops, and sponsoring a high school robotics team. In 2010, they devoted space to the world's first button museum. "Starting the Button Museum has taught me so much about American history," Carter says. "What's great about buttons is that they can easily go from being a comment on current events to a time capsule of events past. I can't think of any other medium that can do that—be both topical and commemorative."

Being topical and commemorative is something Busy Beaver enjoys, especially when producing their own ripped-from-the-headlines buttons. Be it the Bronx Zoo cobra, moments in mustache history, or the



Jon Stewart/Stephen Colbert-led Rally to Restore Sanity and/or Fear, when Busy Beaver makes a statement, it comes with a toothy smile. "When we do choose to comment on pop culture," Carter says, "we try to keep things non-partisan, but fun. Pro-fun—that's a stance we'll easily take!" **HOW**

Joseph Hughes is one-half of the Kent, Ohio-based husband-and-wife creative collaborative Northcoast Zeitgeist. www.northcoastzeitgeist.com
BUSY BEAVER BUTTON COMPANY CHICAGO www.busybeaver.net

WEB EXTRA

Want to start your own line of buttons? Don't miss these 8 pointers from Busy Beaver.

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