

LITCHFIELD BUSINESS

Antique buff pursues career path of choice with new shop

Young collector builds own reputation in father's shadow

By John McKenna
STAFF REPORTER

Jeff Tillou was just 16 when he realized the antique business was the career he would eventually pursue.

The son of internationally-known antique dealer Peter Tillou, Mr. Tillou got his start in the business selling rugs door-to-door as a teenager. He later graduated from Rollins College in Florida with a degree in art history, spent a year working at his father's antique gallery in London, and now owns his own gallery.

Mr. Tillou, 24, opened Jeffrey Tillou Fine Arts on the green in Litchfield in July. The gallery specializes in American antiques, paintings, furniture, glass and porcelain. There's also a collection of brass candlesticks, clocks and decoys.

Some items in his collection date back to the 17th and 18th centuries.

"Even before I went to college I knew I'd end up in this business," Mr. Tillou said. "I've always been interested in collecting."

As an antiques gallery owner, Mr. Tillou's business life revolves around seeking deals on items for his shop. When he's not working in the

shop, Mr. Tillou can often be found traveling to antique shows up and down the East Coast.

"Work for me doesn't end when I leave here," he said. "I'll go home and get on the phone with dealers and clients."

Though the hours can be long and the travel hectic, Mr. Tillou is enjoying what he calls a "24-hour a day job." The dealers he has come to know — many of them have done business with his father — and the clients he's dealt with have made him feel comfortable.

While he's settling into his career, Mr. Tillou has focused on establishing the quality of his business. He doesn't want to rest on the laurels of his family history.

"I have to build my own reputation," he said. "I'm not my father and I won't try to be."

"Being honest and trustworthy is

the bottom line when you're trying to build a business," he continued. "It will always help you no matter where you go."

Although he tries to avoid comparisons with his father, Mr. Tillou said he carries the lessons he learned from his father with him when he's doing business.

When he was growing up, the Prospect Street home in which Mr. Tillou lived was his father's private gallery. Living with antiques fostered his love of their craftsmanship and style, he said.

But his father never pressured him to consider the antique business as a career.

"I was never encouraged to be a dealer by my father," Mr. Tillou said. "I'm in the business because I've always enjoyed it and wanted to be part of it."

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Staff photograph by JOHN McKENNA

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