

# First: Grab the Dog

This year's model is a cement dog — and his new owners.

**By Kakie Urch**

Every year, *Ace Weekly* chooses an exemplar of community participation, activism, action and arts/culture and throws it a crown laced with an Elvis Costello reference so old that it's new again.

And in 2009, Buster, the cement dog that represents the vision, work and community

For months, they worked in the industrial district newly dubbed the Distillery District, creating in the 11,000-square-foot space a billiards lounge and a "backroom" that is in fact a state-of-the-art concert hall.

They have endured those nights that clubowners have: big band, empty room, huge



Clark and Jessica Case picked up Best of Lex Awards in September for Best Music Venue and Best Old Building Rehab

organization of This Year's Model: Clark and Jessica Case — is our pick.

The Cases, if you don't know are the married couple of lawyers who grabbed a cement dog from the wreckage of the CentrePointe demolition, took an old whiskey distillery and a novel historic district, threw in some serious legal and financial dedication and love of music and spirits and opened Buster's Billiards and Backroom in the Old Tarr Distillery at 899 Manchester Street.

Never mind a recession. Never mind that people said it couldn't be done and that many had tried. Never mind that opening a mid-sized music venue requires a strong back, longer-than-lawyering hours and comfortable shoes.

The Cases were music lovers, habitués of the old Buster's, the billiards hall and beer bar in downtown Lexington that fell, along with The Dame and other local businesses, to the wrecking ball that swung to create the as-yet-not-created CentrePoint luxury hotel and office project.

**They grabbed the dog and ran.**

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who spent time as undergraduates absorbing what music they could at the numerous venues like The Dame, Buster's, The Wrocklage, Mecca, Area 51 that provided the space for that. They became attorneys, worked at one of the major firms in town and then struck out on their own, working their own firm that specializes in helping people start businesses.

They took local resources — their own cash, sweat equity and the history of the Bluegrass in the Distillery District — and took action on a community issue that had many

District realizes its full potential, it will be full of businesses that have done the same thing.”

“I urge you, as you're looking down that long list of projects, and trying to decide where to make cuts, that you think about which of these projects will bring this city money in return for the investment you are being asked to make. And the simple fact is that the Distillery District will bring Lexington money. It already is. In renovating the Old Tarr building and outfitting it for Buster's, my husband and I invested three quarters of a million dollars. A substantial amount of this went to local

vered and thrived since the mid-70s through the input The Cases acknowledge and

## Historical Flavor

It's in the Old Tarr Distillery. That's a place where they used to make the flavor. It's in fact, the first registered place that they used to make the flavor in Lexington, Fayette, or Woodford counties. You see, Woodford Reserve is AVAILABLE at Buster's, but Old Tarr itself was registered as Distillery No. 1, 1865. And a border state needed a lot of flavor. ■



people up in arms but with nowhere to shoot.

And by cash, we mean three-quarters of a million dollars cold, which is probably not counting the opportunity cost of what they could bill as lawyery lawyers if they weren't hauling 60 pounds of ice.

And by sweat equity, we mean the several kinds of sweat worked up by yanking industrial corrugated stuff stuff there years ago out to the kind that is worked up when you are standing before City Council and arguing for major bonding or TIF funding for your project.

Here's what Jessica Case had to say to council recently:

“We are proof that the Lexington Distillery District can work. We have breathed new life into a building that has since construction been an integral part of our history and social fabric. And when the Distillery

supply businesses and contractors and to licensing fees (a portion of which end up back in our local government); We spend money with local advertisers and local vendors. We donate our space to local charities so they can raise money for their various causes. We put money back into the community with jobs; we employ more than 30 people, which means that Buster's and the Distillery District are not only providing much-needed jobs for Lexington, we are providing a revenue stream in the form of payroll taxes. This money is immediate. Keep the \$3.2 million in bonded funding for the Distillery District.”

And by the history of the Bluegrass in the Distillery District, we mean the tough history of an area that will represent

And by the history of the Bluegrass, we also mean the history of the extraordinary music scene in Lexington, which has perse-

extend that. They offered their space as the hub space for Boomslang the three-day, multi-venue festival of arts and culture that WRFL and the new generation including Saraya Brewer, James Friley, Ainsley Wagoner, Ross Compton and Cass Dwyer represent. And those kids booked the Olds: Mission of Burma, Os Mutantes and Faust, in addition to the Cool Kids: Atlas Sounds, Rachel Grimes, Kurt Vile, These United States and the Circus and the Accordians.

And they built that cultural history into the space. The bar at Buster's is adorned with a permanent collage that shows the ephemeral highlights of great shows gone by ... by the contemporaries of that bespectacled Declan McManus behind the camera on That Year's Model. The collage was done by a local artist, the opening was advertised on locally produced and hand-printed posters by Cricket Press and on a locally produced Web site by Elevation Creative.

Sometimes, it pays to talk numbers to power. And the Clarks did just that. Here's what Clark Case told council, as the bonding hearing went on and the grass in the horse farm fence down the street at CentrePointe glistened all green.

“Buster's is proving that. Having been open less than three months, we have already sold more than 10,000 tickets to events (that doesn't count the free shows and charity events hosted on the 7 days a week Buster's has been open since September 4. More than 20,000 people have already come for entertainment, charity events, fundraisers, and other civic functions to the Lexington Distillery District. And that's only accounting for one enterprise that's been open for three months in a blighted area with little or no infrastructure.”

In this district, we have the entrepreneurial genius that is Alltech, creating something new in Kentucky Ale that is driving its sponsorship of the World Equestrian Games.

In this district we have a company brewing the first Kentucky vodka — Pure Blue, which mixes well with Ale-8-One and some orange

juice. And in this district, formerly known as “That Place They Keep The Tow Trucks,” we have the Jessica and Clark Case, a concrete dog and Buster's Billiards and Backroom — This Year's Model, which did not wait for permission, but which took a community need, a great idea and their own expertise and creativity and built something new and good.

In the middle of the Great Recession. ■

Kakie Urch is an assistant professor of multimedia in the University of Kentucky's School of Journalism and Telecommunications. She can carry 60 pounds of ice.

## Top Buster's Highlights

- Beaux Arts Ball April 2009 — Buster's supported Beaux Arts early.
- Buster's Collage — Elements of local music scenes gone by are built into the bar
- Opening Night w/ Chico Fellini, These United States, Wax Fang, Silversun Pickups
- Boomslang Night 1: Casino v. Japan, Atlas Sounds, Parlour, Mission of Burma, Faust
- Boomslang Night 2 :Ford Reunion Theatre and the Circus-themed Fashion Show, Papa M., Bardo Pond, The Black Angels
- Boomslang Night 3: Pez Head, Os Mutantes, Fuma with Radau Gypsy Dance, Sacred Fire Circus
- March Madness Marching Band — the marching band that lights up the night
- Lyric Theatre Benefit — reaching out with WUKY-FM for this event
- The Wailers
- Halloween (Halfway to Beaux Arts Ball) with Man Man
- "The Last Waltz" A re-enactment of the historic concert by The Band in the 70s.

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## Model Radio Host, Blogger, Photographer, Renaissance Man: Mick Jeffries.



If you haven't yet tuned in to Mick Jeffries' Trivial Thursdays on WRFL 88.1 Thursday mornings at 7, start setting the alarm (or you can check out the podcasts).

He also has the best local blog according to Ace Readers, so bookmark [minglefreely.com](http://minglefreely.com) and stay tuned there — where you can read about everything from Burning Man, to music, to art, and photography, to the special drink he was commissioned to make for the Derby winners (the owners, not the horse, presumably), and his ongoing adventures with the March Madness Marching Band. And that's just the tip of the iceberg.

## Model/Mobile Stimulus Package: Debra Hensley



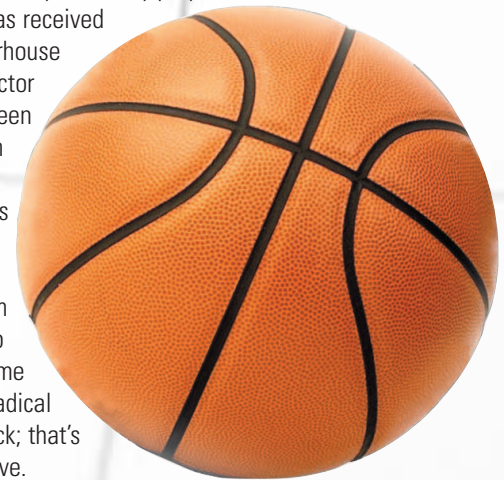
Debra Hensley took her show on the road this year with "mobile" stimulus gatherings — where she invited her friends to "mob" a neighborhood or location, in pursuit of "people/planet/purpose" — also driving revenue, awareness, and attention to local businesses and organizations. Gathering locales included Soundbar on S. Limestone; Morris Book Shop on Southland; and London Ferrell Garden on Third Street (in support of the community garden and SeedLeaf.) Food was provided by Hanna's on Lime.

## Model Believer: Coach Cal



**by Heather C. Watson** This Holiday season, as we hang our Big Blue stockings by the chimney with care, our fondest wishes include a prolonged undefeated streak, a landmark 2,000th win, and a victory over that vile red and black team in the New Year. These gifts won't be delivered by Santa Claus. Rather, Kentucky fans have reason to believe in someone a little sleeker and fitter than Jolly Old Saint Nick, a dynamic crowd-pleaser who snacks not on milk and cookies, but rather on Papa John's 3-Pointer specials. This year, we believe in Coach Cal. As we enter the sixth official week of the Calipari Era, we certainly have Reason to Believe. Kentucky basketball is, once again, a national topic. Our boys grace the ESPN highlight reel every time they play.

Our seemingly super-human Freshman Point Guard has received shout-outs in the most surprising places: NBA powerhouse LeBron James calls himself a John Wall fan, while actor (and native Lexingtonian) Josh Hopkins was recently seen performing the "John Wall dance" on the ABC sitcom *Cougartown*. While sold-out Rupp Arena crowds are commonplace even during mediocre seasons, Cal's Cats have been invited to play one game a season in Madison Square Garden due to our impressive recent turnout against UConn. For a professional sports forum located seven hundred miles away from Lexington to anticipate a guaranteed high-caliber, high-turnout game mere months after our embarrassing trip to the NIT signifies a radical shift. We have every reason to believe that the Wildcats are back; that's definitely the best gift that a Kentucky fan could receive.



Model GrassRootser: Becca Self



**by Rona Roberts** Becca Self combines a lot of good things in a tiny, enthusiastic, positive, pro-justice, pro-Lexington package. She's a 30-year old brilliant scientist (MIT architecture degree.) She's a native Lexingtonian who says she never considered NOT settling in Lexington as an adult. She's just finishing her first year as Seedleaf's first education director, which means she invents fascinating and delightful ways to explain photosynthesis to preschoolers and thinks it is great fun to demonstrate safe tomato canning to their elders. After MIT, Becca began teaching science, first at the high school level, then at the Montessori Middle School of Kentucky. She took the lead at MMSK in inventing an acclaimed land-based science curriculum for middle school students. With adult encouragement (and lots of complicated carpooling), students went to work on 12 acres of urban land the school had bought, but did not yet occupy. With this meaningful approach to science, young Lexingtonians at MMSK became ardent ambassadors for sustainability and local food production. They also become true experts in native species, beneficial insects, stream health, community gardening and produce sales, Community Supported Agriculture (CSAs), multiple types of composting, yurt/shed construction, bee-keeping, rain barrel management, and more. Engaging middle schoolers in real work on real land brought so much natural success that Becca became convinced her life work includes opening similar land-based learning opportunities to children and adults in the larger community. Now Becca teaches and inspires a multi-generational community of people all around the city in neighborhoods and schools where Seedleaf supports productive gardens and orchards. Becca Self is showing all of us in Lexington how to become healthier and more able to produce, cook, and preserve our own food. And by the way, Becca had a crucial role in bringing Will Allen from Growing Power to town through the Lafayette Seminars at the Gaines Center for the Humanities at UK. She worked within the Aylesford Neighborhood Association to get one of the city's recent sustainability grants, for fruit trees. She also won a scholarship as a young leader and went on the Chamber's recent trip to Madison, WI, where she and husband Ben Self had lived briefly.

Model LFUCG Freshman:  
Diane Lawless



**Model Freshman:** Diane Lawless. Council Member Diane Lawless inherited a third district where the nuts and bolts of town-gown had been deferred and delayed for years. Her first year on the Council has included aggressive advocacy for her constituents on major issues including the S. Limestone streetscape and UK campus adjacent housing. (She was voted best local politician by Ace Readers in September.)



New Media Model CouncilPerson:  
Doug Martin

[pictured at Best of Lex, at Awesome, Inc., September 2009] Council Member Doug Martin, 10th District, is this year's LFUCG model for learning the ropes of social media and using it to engage Lexington's citizens — even when it's not always pretty. You can friend him on Facebook, or follow him on Twitter, @dougmartin10th, where he posts news items for his district and LFUCG updates, along with conversational items related to his participation in Lexington's arts and music interests (Nov. 22 "The Lex Singers concert last night w/ James Archambeault photos was one of life's great moments. Singing with Lex Singers was such a joy..." and then twitter cut him off, of course). He follows everyone from local artists, to business people, fellow elected officials, all local news outlets, and a wide array of Lexington interests. (Other twitter accounts within the horseshoe are: @dianelawless, @jimgraylexky, @mayornewberry, @JimGrayforMayor, @ReElectNewberry)



Model Geek: Jason Collins,  
owner, Woodland Computers



**This Year's Model Geek:** Jason Collins at Woodland Computers. Jason Collins opened Woodland Computers earlier this year and has already created a local neighborhood hive of activity that supports, among other things: Local Lexington Businesses; computer service and repair for all brands that includes a free honest estimate without a gouge; environmentally-friendly computers and accessories that don't require a drive past New Circle Road; and a devout embrace of Open Source operating systems intended to ensure stable, virus-free operation with no strings attached. Adding to that, the Woodland Computers retail space also functions as a gallery highlighting the work of local artists (Ace hosted a November Gallery Hop there with art and book signings from local authors Kim Huston and Leslie Guttman).