

LAWRENCE BUSINESS MAGAZINE

2026 Q2



Making an Impact THE FOUNDATION AWARDS

Full coverage of the 2026 Lawrence Business Magazine
Foundation Awards Celebration



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Anne's
Teapot
Collection

Legacy of Love

By Sara Maloney, photos by Steven Hertzog

This family-owned ceramics destination stays true to its community-focused mission decades after opening.

For decades, Bracker's Good Earth Clays has shaped the ceramic and pottery community across Lawrence as well as the whole region. Supplying clay to schools, housing manufacturing materials and supporting local artists through northeast Kansas is at the root of what the family business has always stood for, and their commitment has never wavered.

Bracker's received not one but three Foundation Awards, recognizing those locally focused values—something that Cindy Bracker, owner and president, says reflects what her parents always wanted the business to be.

"We have actually won three times—2020, 2024 and 2025—and it's a real point of pride for me," Bracker explains. "I have the awards sitting on the windowsill right outside my office. It speaks to the importance of our local community to myself and my business. It just kind of fits in really well with what my parents' vision has always been about, the importance of your local community."

Bracker has continued down the path her parents started when they first opened the business. She took over after her mom retired around 2015.

"I think that it's beautiful that these foundation awards are recognizing that," she says.

How It Came To Be

Bracker's parents came to Lawrence in the 1970s after her father, Bill, accepted a position to teach at The University of Kansas. Both Bill and her mother, Anne, were studio potters and were very involved with the local pottery scene, especially the Lawrence Potters' Guild.

It became clear to them that clay was not easily accessible to Lawrence and the wider metro area. Bill frequently traveled to Grain Valley, Missouri, to purchase clay for fellow members of the Guild. They continued to bring more and more clay back for friends and for themselves.

Eventually, the Brackers had created a full-blown supply business. By 1985, Bill and Anne were less focused on creating their own work and more focused on supporting the local ceramics community.



"The growth strategy in the early days, when my mom and dad were doing it together, was just kind of, 'Let's see what kind of an impact we can make on our community,'" Bracker explains.

Her father's philosophy was simple: "We'll do this for a while, and if it stops being fun, we'll just go back to making pots," she says.

Bill passed away when Bracker was in high school, and Anne continued the business, keeping his community-focused mindset at the forefront.

For Bracker, it was never her original plan to join the family business. She earned her degree in music education and had her sights set on being a junior high band and choir teacher.

Over time, and as she neared graduation, she realized there was no way she could step away from the family business she had grown up working in. "As I got closer to graduating, I was realizing that I couldn't imagine my life not working in the family business," she explains.

Bracker ended up meeting her now-husband, Dave, while working at Bracker's, and she continued to watch her mother run the successful business. Her mother's hard work, patience and love for the business taught her everything she knows, along with her "figure it out" mentality, she says.

After her father passed, there was talk around the community about whether the business would stay afloat without Bill at the helm. Some community members doubted whether a woman could successfully keep it afloat, and many made bets about how long it would last, she says.

"They didn't believe, quite honestly, that a woman could do it," Bracker explains. "She proved them very wrong."

Anne continued to grow the business and purchased clay supplier Good Earth Clays when it went out of business. That's when the Bracker's business transitioned its name to Bracker's Good Earth Clays.

Around the same time, pottery was becoming increasingly popular. Media attention, such as from the 1990s movie "Ghost," also proved helpful to the business.

More growth came to Bracker's when the COVID-19 pandemic hit. With more people at home looking for new hobbies, home studios became popular. The growth that began in 2020 has not stopped. The business is continuing to grow 15 to 20 percent year over year, Bracker says.

Bracker is always planning new ideas for how to continue to grow but, more importantly, how the company can better serve the community. With the popularity of local ceramics classes and community studios, they hope to expand to selling supplies to these places, as well, which supports the goal while keeping prices lower for local businesses and creating repeat customers.

Five In One

What is really involved in being an all-in-one ceramics company? Bracker describes it as five businesses rolled into one: retail sales, school supply delivery, clay manufacturing, wholesale operations and website/catalog sales, and equipment repair services.

Bracker's sells dozens of types of clays, many of which they manufacture themselves, and basically anything else you could need to create a project from start to finish. On top of raw materials, there are glazes and underglazes, and studio tools like hand tools, carving and trimming equipment, pottery wheels, slab rollers, mixers, kilns and kiln accessories.



top to bottom:
Bill and Anne, founders Bracker's Earth Clays,
Dave, Cindy at a Ceramics convention

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A big part of the company is the kiln repair services of which Dave is the master, she explains. He's become nationally known for those skills and can offer them to anyone virtually, which is beneficial to something as niche as kiln repair. What started out of necessity during the pandemic has turned into an important feature of the operation.

"That's honestly a big part of the growth of the company," Bracker says, "is the fact that I have a Dave."

With around 10 employees, the goal always is to treat everyone as family and to utilize local Lawrence residents and businesses whenever possible.

"I do try to reinvest in my community with the business that we do. So all of my services that I can get locally, I get locally," she says.

For the regional ceramics' ecosystem, keeping Bracker's around means more affordable costs for all potters. The couple considers their community not just Lawrence but also Topeka, Manhattan and beyond, though they also ship all across the nation now. The nearest competitors are in Denver, Minneapolis, St. Louis and beyond.

"The customers we serve are often well outside of Lawrence just due to the nature of our industry, but Lawrence is at the heart of everything we do," Bracker says. "My staff all lives here in Lawrence, and the business we bring in benefits them and the rest of the community."

A lot of those who travel hours to come to Bracker's make it into a day trip, taking advantage of Lawrence food and local business. Being a steward of the city is a major honor, she says.

Running a small business takes a lot of perseverance, and many times, there aren't a lot of avenues for recognizing small business owners.

"You spend a lot of time and sweat equity, and a lot of blood and a lot of stress ... and it's the kind of thing you don't do unless you love it," Dave says.

But it's worth it, he continues. At the end of the day, the thank-you notes from classrooms and schools continue to remind them why the work matters. It makes awards such as the Foundation Awards feel that much more special.

Bracker became emotional discussing the award, noting that business owners spend years working behind the scenes and trying to support the community.

"The Foundation Awards represent a very special recognition that comes from my business community, so it's very meaningful," she explains. "When you own a business, you often do a lot of things that no one ever sees, hears about, knows about or even thinks about. *Lawrence Business Magazine* and the people who read it, they get it."

Reading *Lawrence Business Magazine* gives Bracker a chance to learn about the various forces that exist in town, she says. And it's an honor to be given the award, especially with the others honored right there with them, she adds.

"Honestly, just thinking about seeing this upcoming article written about my business—the business my parents started here 44 years ago—it's surreal," Bracker says. "Especially because sometimes I feel like I'm an 11-year-old sixth grader having a fever dream the night before going to Exchange City or something." ▲

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above: Bracker's Earth Clays Supplies and showroom

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