

**Jenny Warden**  
**Columnist**

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## **Jenny Warden: A flourishing economy grows on the Ridge**



John Tecklin, a Ridge native, started Mountain Bounty Farm in 1997. It is now the largest organic produce farm in the county.



Surprising to some, the San Juan Ridge is a hotbed of small business. There are about 150 enterprises with over 400 employees on the Ridge, according to a survey conducted by the Ridge Association of Manufacturers and Business Owners (RAMBO).

There are a number of industrial enterprises on the Ridge including construction, automotive repair, solar products, well drillers, gravel and excavation companies, and specialized manufacturers.

Kent White, CEO of TM Technologies, founded his company in 1989 to provide tools and methods for restoration metalworkers.

“I started the company for craftsmen,” he said. “The old guys were dying off, training was fading out, and tools were obsolete. Our products are used in everything from metal sculptures to aircraft, motorcycles, and cars.”

Kent invented several products to use in metal restoration, including a welding lens and an air power hammer. He is known for his 25 instructional DVDs on metalworking; and for his YouTube videos on brazing, welding and metal shaping. (See [tinmantech on YouTube](#)).

There is a flourishing economy on the Ridge that offers permanent jobs for skilled people. And it is at great risk from the proposed San Juan Ridge gold mine's voracious water use.

Kent is a Boeing-approved sheet metal instructor and has traveled to Ireland to make on-site repairs to heavy cargo planes. He helped Lockheed prototype a new U-2 (old spy plane) configuration. His clients include prototype shops at Ford, Polaris, Mercury Marine, Northrop, and FMC. "We are unknown locally and well-known nationally."

TM Technologies has scheduled nine training workshops this year including a 3-Day Metalworking Intensive; Welding, Brazing, Soldering; and Metalworking Techniques for Sculptors and Metal Artists. The company also publishes a catalog of hand tools, machines, DVDs, and books. (see [www.tinmantech.com](http://www.tinmantech.com)).

The San Juan Ridge is also home to artisans in woodworking, jewelry, pottery, sculpture, painting, and weaving.

Stefanie Freydon't started Extasia Jewelry in 1991. Its jewelry features old world artistry of intaglios and cameos in contemporary designs. The jewelry is sold through its catalogue; museums, including and Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Louvre; and an outlet store in Nevada City.

Stefanie is well known in Nevada County, having helped start the North Columbia Schoolhouse Cultural Center and working for the Nevada County Arts Council.

"The 1970s were a renaissance for craftspeople," she said. "I had been trained as a bench jeweler. I loved to work with my hands and so I opened Extasia. We do all of the assembly here on the Ridge; though we source materials from a several European countries. There are a number of forces that created a good business environment for rural companies. UPS provided manufacturers with worldwide distribution; and the Internet allowed us to reach distant markets. Extasia has 14 employees. Rural people tend to be hard working and skilled — capable of making house repairs, keeping a car running, and working with tools. I just put a smaller pair of pliers in their hands."

"Some artisans work mainly with the right, or creative, side of their brains. I mastered analytic proficiency in rural economic development which enabled me to analyze markets, measure financial performance, and evaluate new opportunities. We are planning a line of jewelry for the Getty Museum based on their statue of Hercules. We'll adapt the image to our products, and create cuff links, tie clips, and such for men. We will then retail them as a private label through the museum."

The agricultural sector includes 10 nurseries, two garden supply stores, landscapers, cattle ranchers, horse trainers, wineries, a feed store, a farmers market and numerous small growers selling eggs, organic plants, herbal products.

Mountain Bounty Farm specializes in organic vegetables and berries. Its main market is through a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) system where members pay up front for a weekly box of fruits and vegetables.

John Tecklin, a Ridge native, started Mountain Bounty Farm in 1997. It is now the largest organic produce farm in the County.

“We started with 48 subscribers and now have 600 from the Ridge to Grass Valley to Truckee,” he said. “We also have a lively presence at the Saturday Farmer’s Market in Nevada City, as well as selling to local natural food stores.”

John was an apprentice at a CSA in Oregon where he learned the basics.

“I started small because of limited knowledge and resources,” he said. “I’ve learned both by doing and from networking with other farmers in California and Oregon.” ATTRA, the National Sustainable Agriculture Information Service, also provides useful information.

Mountain Bounty Farm has eight full-time employees and an additional six seasonal workers during the spring and summer. It also offers internships.

“We don’t want to grow our business any further; we want to expand our product lines and provide subscribers with the best local food they can find,” he added.

Subscribers can sign up anytime throughout the year online at [www.MountainBountyFarm.com](http://www.MountainBountyFarm.com).

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Jenny Warden, who lives on the San Juan Ridge, is a member of The Union Editorial Board. Her opinion is her own and does not reflect the viewpoint of The Union or its editorial board.

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