



New Directors Excited for Opportunity to Lead Vermont Woodworking School

The Vermont Woodworking School (VWS) recently welcomed Catherine Emil and Jared Williams as the new directors and owners of the school. After thirteen years co-founders Carina Driscoll and Blake Ewoldsen recently stepped away from leading the school.

Catherine and Jared are both graduates of VWS's Immersion Program and after meeting at the school became the founders and owners of Towards Nightfall in Fairfax, VT. Towards Nightfall builds custom and built-to-order furniture for both residential and commercial settings. In 2019 the business was honored with the Emerging Woodworker of the Year award by the VWWC. Towards Nightfall began in May of 2018 and the pair were continuing to work out of one of the school's woodworking incubators when the opportunity arose for them to take over as owners and directors of the school. The original transition was planned to take place in the early spring of this year. However, the Coronavirus shutdowns disrupted the process and Catherine and Jared officially began their roles in August.

Catherine was born and raised in Manhattan and grew up without any woodworking experience. She attended Dartmouth College and earned a degree in History, but while at Dartmouth her interest in woodworking began from some of the architecture and engineering related courses she took. While greatly enjoying them, she never considered that line of work as a potential career. Upon graduating from college Catherine returned to NYC and worked different jobs in the following years including interior design, bookkeeping and sales for a company called Imagination Playground, and a position with the Children's Museum of Manhattan. Throughout this time, she continued to explore her woodworking interest and increasingly missed the "hand's on" aspect of woodwork in her jobs. Catherine eventually decided to pursue her interest full-time by enrolling in the Vermont Woodworking School.

Jared hails from the San Antonio, Texas area and his passion for woodwork began at a young age from his time in the Boy Scouts and also his grandfather who built furniture. In high school Jared took woodshop and welding-related classes which further grew his interest in woodwork. Jared originally started in the restaurant industry, but after a few years in the business was feeling burned out and he decided to take a different path. Through some craft-related courses at a place called Homestead Heritage, Jared was able to build furniture and realize woodwork was his passion. Accompanying his parents on the Vermont portion of a tour of New England, Jared was able to visit and spend some time at the Vermont Woodworking School. Soon afterward he enrolled and completed the Immersion Program.

As director of the VWS Catherine handles the day-to-day operations of the school including program assistance, enrollment, recruitment, advising of students, finances, and bookkeeping. She also works to establish new and foster current relationships the school has with outside associations like the Guild of Vermont Furniture Makers, Northern Vermont University, and Vermont State Craft Centers. Jared is the Director of Operations and his main duty is maintaining the woodwork machines and making sure tools and materials are available for students. He manages the school's housing as well.

The school is in a good place and the new semester has started better than expected despite the Coronavirus pandemic according to Catherine and Jared. The unemployment caused by the pandemic has led many people to look for a fresh start, and because of that crafts and rural education are on the upswing. The school has adjusted to ACCD Manufacturing and Vermont State guidelines and are currently adhering to restrictions such as operating at $\frac{3}{4}$ capacity, mandatory mask wearing, and socially distanced work benches. As Catherine said, "We are open, but strict about guidelines." The pair are still adjusting to operating the school and Towards Nightfall. Orders are still coming in at Towards Nightfall, and they are continuing to fill those orders even with all the work they are doing at the VWS. They are focusing on the school presently in order to get themselves situated in their positions and the operations of the school.

Catherine and Jared are both excited to lead the school calling it a "thrilling opportunity." Catherine stated, "[We] love the school. It is a special place for us and Vermont." Both greatly enjoyed their time as students at the VWS and found it to be a very influential time in their lives. They are grateful for the opportunity to keep growing the school. Looking ahead, Catherine and Jared shared that their vision for the school is still a work in progress. For the near future the duo's goal is to keep the school stable through the pandemic. Later on, they want to have more community programs offered at the school, bring in more professional workers from in and outside of Vermont for summer programs, and continue to form and build relationships with outside associations. Yet, their main goal is always to continually improve the school and as Catherine said, "create a bigger, better woodworking industry."