Don’t let its traditional name fool you. Watermark Press is Martha Jeffrey Galuszka’s newly founded, green inroad into the centuries-old art of printmaking.

Driven as much by her own medical history of asthma as by her environmental conscience, the 2004 Hartford Art School alumna opened Watermark in the spring of 2007 in Hartford, Conn. Galuszka gives artists—professionals and novices alike—the chance to explore the world of printmaking and the creative book arts in a bright, inviting studio offering nontoxic, solvent-free, water-based inks and cleaning supplies.

“The movement away from the use of hazardous chemicals is important to many artists,” Galuszka says. “They have historically been at the forefront in encouraging the use of safe materials, representing concern for both the individual and the planet.” She emphasizes that traditional solvents used to clean iron printing presses after every print run contribute greatly to the environmental problem. At Watermark, “rubbing alcohol is the strongest chemical in there,” she says.

In a difficult economy, Galuszka is also concerned about the prohibitive cost of printmaking materials. A single 12-by-18-inch sheet of copper plating, for example, can cost $50. The inveterate printmaker, painter, and bookmaker is constantly researching substitutes for traditional printing materials and techniques. Along with rainbow jars of water-soluble pigments, her studio shelves and flat drawers are stocked with sheets of cellophane, Mylar, and old dental tools, which have effectively replaced costlier materials.

Artists of all abilities are welcome to rent Watermark studio time to try out the new inks and materials. For the first time this winter, Galuszka is also working with an after-school, art-focused class of West Hartford fifth-graders. The students are designing and etching their plates in their own classroom, then inking and printing them in the Watermark studio on one of two professional presses.

As Watermark grows, Galuszka plans to expand her workshop offerings. For now, she says, “I’m trying to leave no carbon footprint.”

Martha Jeffrey Galuszka ‘04 pulls an intaglio/carborundum print from the etching press in her Watermark Press studio.