

The Jewelry Source Celebrates 25 Years as Local Retail Gem

By Brian Simon

Many successful businesses start out with a carefully constructed plan, often involving many months or even years of research before officially launching. Others happen on the fly and end up just fine anyway. Such was the case with downtown El Segundo mainstay The Jewelry Source, which this week celebrates its 25th anniversary as one of the city's most celebrated and longest-standing retailers. Yet back in 1984, founding owners Brenda Newman and Roanne Mahony had no particular thoughts about opening a jewelry store. "Literally 25 years ago, we were at a little area trade show and we designed a piece of jewelry that Roanne wore to a party," recalled Newman. "Her friends were crazy about the necklace and asked if they could have one made for them. So we decided right then and there to go into business."

Said business has evolved quite a bit since its humble beginnings in an 84-square foot hallway on Grand Avenue, where Newman and Mahony originally sold a line of beads to major department stores and small boutique shops up and down the California coast. Once the two began offering their own necklace designs to local patrons, the business quickly developed a following and eventually moved around the block and then to its current location at 337 Main Street.

Despite hitting a few tough recessionary periods, The Jewelry Source managed triple digit growth just about every year of its operation—a trend that continues to this day. "Early on, we had only three employees (two owners and one craftsman), low overhead, low cost of doing business, and one customer at a time," said Newman. "We advertised consistently, but created our own ads and did direct mailing to communicate with our existing customer base, which still makes up 80 percent of our business. We never took loans out for inventory of any sort and paid for things as we went along. And we stayed positive through any adversity. We may have been a little naïve, but it has worked for us."

Newman's first major investment was a \$5,000 gemological laboratory bought for cash. Five years ago, she automated the business via computer, which allows her to more effectively reach her customer base by providing new services such as "wishlists."

Then in 2006, she added to the state-of-the-art on-site repair shop a laser welder. The store's workshop has grown from one jeweler's bench crammed into a 150-square foot back office to a spacious 750-square foot area with three benches and two full-time craftsmen. "The repair side of the business generates a service that isn't just selling from the showcases," said Newman. "In a recession, people have jewelry and items set aside,

and maybe they'll get something repaired instead. This has helped continue to grow the business and provide a unique service."

To celebrate one-quarter century in the community and to give back to its many loyal customers, The Jewelry Source has created a unique sale built around the "25" theme. Through September 5, the first 25 people who come into the store each day will receive a surprise gift. Additionally, customers will get a special fleur-de-lis pearl pendant—while supplies last—with any merchandise purchase (battery and watch repair service not included). Showcase items in stock will also be discounted between 10 and 50 percent. "We're also serving champagne and cupcakes," added Newman.

As an additional and more prolonged thank you, patrons can come in anytime between now and the end of the year for a free polish and cleaning of any custom jewelry originally produced and designed at the store. "We sent a letter out looking to reach as much of our clientele as we could find going back many years," explained Newman. "We're doing this to photograph and archive the designs."

Aside from Newman, The Jewelry Source now has six employees, five of whom are graduate gemologists, and each brings valuable talents to the table. Mahony, now retired, still comes in the store more often than not and will occasionally create one of her signature designs. "We have a very good crew and most have been with us for a long time," said Newman. "We strive to provide the best possible service when customers come in the store." Meanwhile, the most recent addition to The Jewelry Source family is not an employee per se, but an especially friendly "Labradoodle" (Labrador Retriever and Standard Poodle mix) aptly named Gemma. Every jewelry store needs a mascot, right?

A staunch supporter of the downtown area as co-chair of the El Segundo Chamber of Commerce's Downtown El Segundo Committee (DESI) and a happy resident of the community, Newman can't imagine being anywhere else. "Our downtown is an incredibly preserved community environment that you just don't find much of anymore," she said. "But now we're starting to see a lot of new faces who have either moved here from out of town or been referred by a customer. They just can't believe El Segundo is here. It still amazes me how unique this community is. It's just a wonderful place to live and to have a business. We are all so thankful for the support we've received for the last 25 years. It has been a beautiful ride, so let's see what the next 25 will bring." For more information on The Jewelry Source's 25th anniversary sale, call 310-322-7110.

Board members welcome latest STAR achievement report

By Erik Derr

On the same day educators in Los Angeles voted to let outside organizations run hundreds of their failing schools, the El Segundo School Board got only upbeat news about their district's results in the state's latest round of standardized testing.

During the board's regular meeting Aug. 25, the three board members in attendance — President Ann Coles, Robin Funk and Lisa Wilkin — were told district students once again showed marked improvement in the annual Standardized Testing and Reporting program, a set of tests administered at the tail end of last school year.

The state board of education uses STAR to measure basic student skills against federal standards determined by the No Child Left Behind Act, passed in 2001. The legislation was initiated by the George W. Bush Administration and championed by the late U.S. Senator Edward Kennedy.

Janice Hickey, assistant superintendent, began a discussion of the STAR scores, released earlier this month, by warning the board the numbers she had were preliminary and needed further study by district analysts. But, she said, even the raw information indicated "overall upward trajectory," though there was notable "variation in scores from year to year."

About 83 percent of last year's fourth-graders demonstrated proficient or advanced levels in English language arts, up from 71 percent in 2003, the first year of the STAR regimen. That same group showed an 81 percent jump in writing proficiency, from about 5 percent in 2003 to about 86 percent in 2009. Fourth-grade math scores also showed a nine

percent rise during the same period, from 71 percent to 80 percent.

The seventh-grade class showed a 20 percent proficiency increase in English language arts, from about 61 percent in 2003 to 81 percent last year. Their writing scores shot up 62 percent, from about 20 percent proficiency to 82 percent. And seventh-grade math rose 14 percent, with about 61 percent of tested students showing proficient or advanced skill levels in 2003, compared to about 75 percent in 2009.

Ninth-grade proficiency grew 13 percent, from about 69 percent to 83 percent, in English language arts. The class also rose about 53 percent, from 17 percent in to 70 percent, in first-year Algebra; rose about 22 percent, from 66 percent to 88 percent, in Geometry; and improved about 28 percent, from 60 percent proficient to 88 percent, in Biology.

The report also showed significant gains in eighth-grade geometry, 10th-grade geometry and biology and 11th-grade biology.

According to a release last week by Jack O'Connell, the state superintendent of education, the estimated 4.7 million California students who took the STAR in 2009 showed an overall increase over 2003 scores of 15 percent in English language arts, from 35 percent to 50 percent proficiency, and an 11-percent boost in math, from 35 percent to 46 percent.

The board members said they were pleased with the initial findings, but wondered out loud if their testing result would drop again amid the No Child Left Behind standards.

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