

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.

Who Has Been to Hood River?

By Karen King Russo

Are you as surprised as I am to discover new places of interest, some you had never heard of before, that are not that far from home? This is from a person who is passionate about foreign travel, so much so that I owned and managed a travel agency in Redondo Beach for 20 years. I would still have it were it not for the infringement of the Internet.

The point is that during that time I enjoyed the benefits that came from my business, seeking out adventures on all the continents, turning up my nose at any place close to home. After all, there was not much profit in sending someone to Tucson compared to Tanzania.

I still covet foreign travel—the more exotic the better—riding a camel across a desert or meandering through markets where Asian ladies sit behind baskets selling eels. That being said, I have come to truly appreciate treasures all across America, especially in the West. More to the point, I am astounded to discover places I did not know of, right near home. Many of my favorites are in California, which I will discuss in a future article. But for now, I just returned from Hood River, Oregon.

Until my cousin's daughter, Katie, moved there a few years ago, I had not heard of it. Good friends and relatives had caused us to visit Portland and Corvallis; not Hood River.

After graduating from the University of Oregon, Katie took a year off to teach skiing at Mount Hood. Then a terrible ski accident left her with an injured leg. It required several surgeries and a prolonged stay in a hospital... then a hotel in Hood River. The kindness of the people there, the compelling scenery, and meeting Nate who owns the Dog River Cof-

fee shop, did it for her. Hood River became her home. It was their wedding we attended.

I found Hood River to be a surprisingly spiffy town of attractive gift stores, restaurants, and restored Victorian houses dating from 100 years ago in the time of the lumber boom. Just 60 miles from Portland and about 45 miles from Mount Hood, it sits on the banks of the Columbia Gorge where the Columbia, White Salmon, and Hood rivers merge. The Columbia Gorge is a narrow passage through the Cascade Mountain Range where the Columbia River passes from the eastern desert to the cool maritime climate on its way to the Pacific.

Because of the windy conditions, as in constant, Hood River is the windsurfing capital of the world. People come from all over to windsurf. Windsurfing sails and boards are made there, lessons are available, and the rivers are alive with color. If you are not a windsurfer, the wind gets pretty tedious. Of more interest is the Fruit Loop, a 35-mile circle drive featuring 34 numbered stops at small working farms, country stores, flower and produce markets, bakeries, alpaca farms, and wine tasting rooms representing the 40 flourishing local wineries.

In this compact area of the Columbia Gorge, there apparently lies a combination of climate, soil and geology that creates distinctly different microclimates perfect for growing pears (the area is the main producer of pears in the country), apples, peaches, berries, cherries and, more recently and more profitably, grapes. The damp western area is suited to Pinot Noir, Chardonnay, and Riesling. The drier eastern area works for Bordeaux and Cabernet Sauvignon. The sprawl of the orchards and vineyards with the

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