

Modern Jewelers Celebrates 70 Years

Written by Margaret Evans, Editor
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This year, Modern Jewelers celebrates 70 years in business. For over 50 of those years, the store has been in Rosemary Cuppia's family - her parents bought it in 1966 - and she and her husband Kevin have owned and operated it together since the early 80s. Their son Chase came on board almost ten years ago, making Modern Jewelers a three-generation family business. We recently spoke with Rosemary and Kevin Cuppia about this downtown Beaufort institution.

LWC: The store opened in 1947, right after WWII, which launched the Baby Boom. Were there lots of engagement rings flying out the door at that time? What other merchandise was popular in that post-war era?

Kevin: I've been told that, yes, the engagement rings and wedding bands were very big sellers. Other popular items were electric clock watches and charm bracelets. Modern Jewelers even sold console record players.

LCW: Rosemary, your parents bought the business in 1966. Did you work there as a child? What can you remember?

Rosemary: I was six when I first remember going to the jewelry store with Mom and Dad. I remember unpacking merchandise. I remember my mom doing all the bookkeeping in ledgers by hand. There were not calculators, so she did all the math on paper. I remember Saturdays the most - my friends and I would meet downtown and get candy at Luther's Pharmacy.

LCW: Tell us about the name 'Modern Jewelers.' Has the store always been called that? If so, what was so 'modern' about it when it opened in 1947?

Kevin: I never got a definitive answer, but I believe after the war, everything was "modern." Houses, appliances, electronics . . .

LCW: Are bridal registries still a big deal in 2017? Does the modern bride still register for china? What about silver? Crystal? Has that changed at all over the years?

Rosemary: Bridal registry has always been an important part of our business, but times and interests have certainly changed. Today, the bride does not necessarily want fine china and crystal, and many have patterns passed down from family. I still get excited when we can help new couples select giftware.

LCW: In a world of shopping malls, big box stores, and Amazon, why is your small town, family-owned jewelry store still doing great business? What makes it special?

Kevin: Not "great," but we do have a successful business. Sure, all the other shopping opportunities have created great competition. We have adapted and have found new manufacturers and dealers that keep us price competitive. The real key has been offering a good value with great service. Chase has brought us into the internet world.

LCW: Your son Chase has been working at the store for almost 10 years now, specializing in custom-design jewelry. How big a part of your business is that? Do you find that people are more interested in designing their own engagement rings and wedding rings now than they were in the past?

Kevin: Custom jewelry is a very important part of today's business. So many women today search and search for the ring style that fits them. Chase has built more engagement rings from

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pictures sent over a text message . . . It sounds crazy, but I can't count how many engagement rings Chase has sold without having the guy even enter our store.

LCW: These days, people do so much of their shopping online. Why do you think people still like to pick out jewelry "in person" ?

Kevin: No one can deny that shopping online has exploded. But I have seen more people get ripped off from online purchases of jewelry. "I thought it was heavier . . ." "The store looked much nicer online than what I got . . ." I think jewelry is more personal, and you need to trust your jeweler. You can pick price online, but quality and value you need to *feel*.

LCW: Several decades ago, you sold guitars and guitar strings at Modern Jewelers. What do you sell today that people might not expect to find at a jewelry store?

Rosemary: We hear all the time what wonderful gifts we carry. A first time customer will say, "I didn't know you sold baby gifts!" I think scented and battery-operated candles would be one thing that surprises people.

Modern Jewelers is located at 807 Bay Street in downtown Beaufort. For more information call 843-524-3526 or visit www.beaufortsjeweler.com