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Personalized jewelry sparkles in Victorian setting

Custom orders available in broad range of styles

By LARA ERICSON

Mary Bassett's favorite hobby is her business. The owner of Mae Beads works out of a charming location on Park Avenue in a traditional Victorian home. It is a perfect setting for her jewelry. With deep red walls, lace curtains and an Oriental rug on the floor, the atmosphere is far different from that of a shopping mall.

"A visit to Mae Beads isn't your traditional shopping experience—it's more of an enjoyable event," says Bassett, 47. "The boutique provides a relaxing atmosphere where people can leisurely browse, try pieces on and chat with each other about what they like."

PROFILE

Mae Beads

She says she often hosts wine and cheese events or afternoon teas where customers bring a group of friends to socialize and shop.

"What really sets Mae Beads apart is the personalized and focused attention that I give to each of my customers," Bassett says. "I specialize in custom-made, one-of-a-kind pieces to complement personal wardrobes and individual styles."

Mae Beads' clients can choose from an array of designs. Bassett also takes custom orders. Her designs range from elegant and Victorian to casual and artsy styles.

"I also enjoy scouring antique shops for unique vintage pieces—I'm often taking things apart and re-creating something new," Bassett says. "I look for opportunities to design new pieces out of heirlooms that have special meaning for people, but are outdated or unwearable, and make them into unique keepsakes they will wear and enjoy."

Mae Beads' jewelry appeals to middle-aged businesswomen who like to have fun with their accessories, she says. A spacious dressing room in the store allows female customers to bring in their outfit and try it on with the jewelry they are considering. Necklaces at Mae Beads cost from \$40 to \$125.

"It's not just women who enjoy purchasing my pieces; some of my best cus-



Photo by Kimberly McKinzie

Owner and jewelry designer Mary Bassett says her location on Park Avenue has played a big role in her business' success.

tomers are men," Bassett says. "I love to see how excited they get when I help them find something special for that special someone."

Most of her customers are repeat buyers, but there are also a small number of walk-ins. Even those who have moved away from the Rochester area still shop at Mae Beads.

Bassett's jewelry making stemmed from a love of accessories and an inability to find the right jewelry to match an outfit. Her experience was shared by many friends who offered to pay for jewelry she made for them. As the number of requests increased, Bassett decided she could create a business out of that demand.

Mae Beads was founded in 2001 in Bassett's home and moved to its current location in 2005. Bassett manages the store on

her own. She says the company has been successful despite its limited hours due to her day job at Eastman Kodak Co., where she has worked for 27 years.

Having another job creates other advantages for Bassett, who, as worldwide director of sales and customer training for Kodak's entertainment imaging unit, has the opportunity to travel frequently. Many of her beads come from faraway locations such as Italy, where she purchases one of her favorites, Venetian glass. Bassett prides herself in having unique beads in her jewelry.

She stays away from the festival circuit, because she believes that the display of the jewelry is very important. Bassett, however, does participate in the Park Avenue festival, where she can lure prospective customers into her store.

Mae Beads' location has played a big role in its success. The store does not advertise, so its listing on the Park Avenue Merchant Association's Web site is crucial in attracting customers. Mae Beads also receives publicity at events for the Humane Society

at Lollypop Farm and the American Heart Association, where Bassett donates some of her goods.

Bassett is content with her business. Eventually, she would like to retire and work full time at Mae Beads, expanding

her merchandise into other areas of beading. For now, Bassett cherishes being able to make what she loves and see other people enjoy her creations.

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