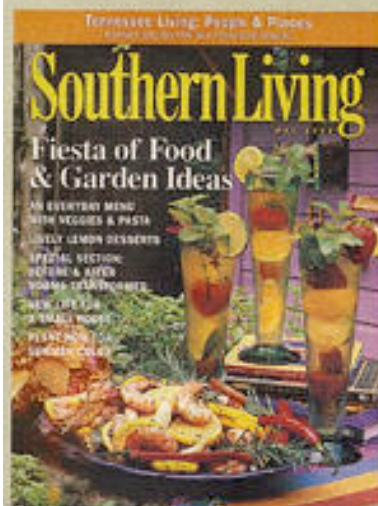


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Gifted at Gifts

Customized bracelets entice shoppers to Gifts Galore. The store's variety keeps them coming back.

I started out with a single aisle in the drugstore," says Rhonda Gordon. Even then, the young entrepreneur possessed a flair for choosing trends destined for mass appeal. After graduating from The University of Tennessee with a marketing degree, "I just kept taking over more and more of the drugstore," she says.

Today, Gifts Galore in Knoxville occupies a 5,000-square-foot space. Yet the specialty shop for infants, children, and women still adjoins Gordon's Drug Store on Oak Ridge Highway. That's because Rhonda married pharmacist Mike Gordon, the owner of the drugstore.

Rife With Relatives

Kinfolk abound in this gift business. Rhonda's mother, Brenda Williams, sews monograms for such items as the store's baby pillows and Vera Bradley tote bags. "I quit my bookkeeping job. Now my daughter is my boss," Brenda says.



above: The Queen 'Bee'd line of jewelry features handmade glass beads. **top:** Owner Rhonda Gordon (right) and her sister Angela Leach

But her real job, she confides, is as full-time grandma to Rhonda and Mike's daughters, Grace and Sarah. "They have a playroom upstairs," Rhonda says. "We can't get them to go home when it's time to leave."

The oldest, Sarah, likes to tell how she helps out. "The first thing I learned was how to get the money out of the cash register," the



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6-year-old says solemnly. "Yeah," her mother replies with a laugh, "she loves to get all the money out and throw it on the floor." Sarah's loyal grandma quickly defends the child: "She helped me put in light-bulbs the other day," Brenda says.

Rhonda's sister, Angela Leach, looks on the familiar family scene with a smile. Her quiet manner markedly contrasts with Rhonda's ninety-to-nothing chatter. Angela helps her sibling run the store and creates many of the handmade glass beads used in Gifts Galore's pieces of jewelry.

Chains Of Love

By far, the most popular item at Gifts Galore remains the customized jewelry, especially bracelets for moms. These stylish strands of silver, gold, or a combination of the two feature the names of children or grandchildren in block letters. The store also offers bracelets for children made from the same components.

The store's exclusive Queen 'Bee'd customized bracelets boast Austrian crystals and handmade glass beads and silver from Bali, Turkey, and Angela Leach's kiln. "See the little crowns?" Rhonda points out a dangling silver charm. "That's what makes it a Queen 'Bee'd bracelet."



Figure

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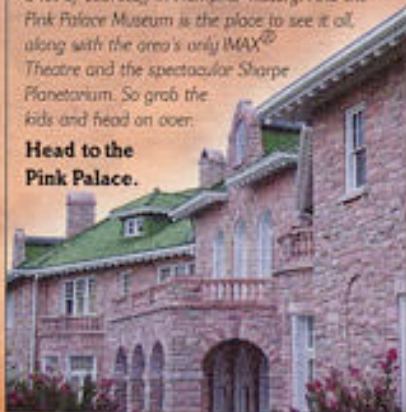


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What's In, What's Out

To keep up with trends, "I watch what's happening on the West Coast," Rhonda says. "It always occurs there first before it gets here. I handpick and buy every item in the store." As an example, she shows off a sparkling bracelet called an Italian Modular and says, "The stars are buying these."

She adds, "Variety is what brings people to my store. It's a one-stop shop. I don't sell just one thing, like a babies' store, a ladies' store, or a jewelry store."

Instead, moms-to-be can order personalized baby announcements or customized nursery bedding using a computer software program and fabric swatches. Young mothers can out-

"I just kept taking over more and more of the drugstore."

Rhonda Gordon, owner of Gifts Galore

fit their children in adorable clothes, while older moms can buy a just-right accessory for themselves or their grown daughters. Men can relax in the store's "husband chair" while

perusing the wish list filled out by the special women in their lives.

"I really try to know each of my customers on a personal basis," says Rhonda. "I think that's why they keep coming back, because we do our best to treat them like they're at home." For this family, Gifts Galore practically is home.

NANCY DORMAN-HICKSON

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