



SCOTT ANDERSON/Courier-Post file
Silversmith Michele Grady creates rings in her Marlton home. Grady offers group jewelry-making workshops in private homes in South Jersey.

Handmade jewelry offers shared hobby, affordable gifts

By KATIE KALVAITIS
For the Courier-Post

Karen Gerber has been making her own beaded jewelry for four years. Recently, she transformed it from a solo hobby into a group hobby with friends.

She gathers regularly with friends and co-workers for an informal jewelry-making party. They set out snacks and surround themselves with thousands of beads. Three hours later, everyone emerges with at least one wearable piece.

"It's a fun, cheap way to get some jewelry, but also hang out with friends and build on each other's creativity. It's much better than doing it alone," said Gerber, a school psychologist for the Penns Grove-Carneys Point Regional School District.

Gerber and her jewelry-making friends rotate homes for each meeting. Beginners are welcome. At the most recent party, Gerber showed a few beginners how to manipulate metal and chains to bend and twist.

With the holiday season arriving against the backdrop of a struggling economy, many people are turning to their creative sides to make hand-crafted gifts for family and friends.

Two Christmases ago, Gerber said she saved money by gifting handmade scarves and neckties and last summer she and a bride-to-be made jewelry for the bridesmaids to wear during the wedding.

"Affordable activities are key. Women still want to go out and have fun, but can't afford the shopping spree they used to," said Amy Blevins, jewelry artist and co-owner of Pitman's Bead & Glass Boutique.

Eat, drink and bead merry

Blevins and her fiancé George Bostan, co-owner of the business, have expanded on the growing popularity of jewelry-making as a hobby by organizing private design parties at the Bead & Glass Boutique.

See JEWELRY, Page 2C

IF YOU GO

- Bead & Glass Boutique, 36 S. Broadway, Pitman. <http://beadandglass.com> or (856) 827-0030
- Michele Grady (designs, parties and classes). www.michelegrady.com or (856) 296-4366
- Creative Genies Art Gallery & Studio, 32 N. Main St., Medford. www.creativegeniesonline.com or (609) 714-1121
- The Bead Celler, 5305 Westfield Ave., Pennsauken. www.beadcellar.com or (856) 685-4744
- Jubb Beads & Yarns, 713 Haddon Ave., Collingswood. www.jubbbeadsand yarns.com or (856) 858-7844
- The Queen Bead, Arlan Plaza, 2999 E. Evesham Road, Voorhees. www.queenbeadnj.com or (856) 424-4201
- BeadStyle magazine. www.beadstylemag.com
- South Jersey Bead Society. www.southjerseybeadsociety.com

2C

COURIER-POST, Tuesday, December 23, 2008

LVI

Jewelry/Make-your-own parties for women grow in popularity

Continued from Page 1C

"This has been an up-and-coming hobby/craft for a long time, and is starting to become more mainstream among people who aren't in it for the business angle but in it for the fun of it," said Blevins, who has been designing and making jewelry herself for six years.

An option to home parties, Ladies Night at Bead & Glass Boutique consists of six or more friends getting together to shop, design and socialize privately after the boutique has closed its doors to customers. Staff is there to assist with design ideas and to finish the piece by attaching clasps. Private parties also have been organized at the shop for happy hours, back-to-ketete parties, bridal showers and pre-wedding parties to make bride and bridesmaid jewelry, Blevins said.

The Bead & Glass Boutique also offers space and supplies for children's parties and play dates and sessions for Girl Scouts to earn their jewelry badge.

Parties are less than \$25 per person and no experience is necessary. "Our parties have been a huge success. I think people like making jewelry in an organized group; they don't want to come in lost on their own, they would rather



CHRIS LUCHALL/Courier-Post file
Judy Weinstein, owner of Jubb Beads & Yarns in Collingswood, puts the finishing touches on a beaded bookmark in her Collingswood shop. The store is one of several in the area where jewelry makers gather to create handmade jewelry to wear or give as gifts.

or be lost in a group," Blevins said.

One party offered at Creative Genies Art Gallery & Studio in Medford is a pendant-making party (using polymer clay) for 10-12 year-olds. Kids "absolutely love the pendants because not only do they get to create their own unique piece of jewelry but they also get to wear their pendants to school," owner Julie Basello-Holt said.

Michele Grady, a jewelry artist from Marlton, recently attended a ladies night out party in Medford Lakes as a guest instructor. The host served food and wine and women sat around the dining room table and worked on their pieces while Grady showed them how to make wire-wrapped pendants, earrings and rings using sea glass collected on vacation.

"Some made holiday gifts while others made pieces for themselves. Everyone seemed to enjoy themselves, including me, and all went home with new jewelry and new skills that they can use

to create more wonderful items in the future," Grady wrote in her blog.

Beginners shouldn't hesitate to try their hands at jewelry, she said. "Some people just have that natural creative ability. Others have creativity but just don't know what to do with it," Grady said.

More than a hobby

Whether with friends or alone, this hobby is a great way to express your creativity.

"When you make something to give as a gift or receive a piece of handmade jewelry, you get something that no one else has. You won't see the person next to you wearing it," said Attya Griffin, a Pennsauken resident who turned her hobby into a part-time business — Genue Creations.

"It's the extra time and effort that someone put into making a piece of jewelry . . . You know you're getting or giving something that is one of a kind."

How to get started making jewelry

1. Take a beginner's class. Many local shops offer them for free or at very little cost. "It takes the guess work out of it and shortens the learning curve," said Amy Blevins, co-owner of Bead & Glass Boutique in Pitman.
2. Bead & Glass Boutique offers free Basic Stringing 101. Creative Genies Art Gallery & Studio in Medford is a full-service art and pottery studio and retail gallery that offers similar beginner classes and advanced workshops.
3. Shop around and see what classes are out there. It's easier to have someone show you as opposed to having to figure it out on your own," said Michele Grady, silversmith and jewelry artist from Marlton.
4. Get a proper set of tools. "Raiding your husband's toolbox — although it works in the beginning — after a while you'll learn you're not using the right tools," Blevins said. A good set costs about \$20 and includes the four basic pliers you need (crimping, chain nose, round nose and flush cutters).
5. Practice healthy bending by stretching your legs, back and arms.
6. Use good lighting to avoid eyestrain.
7. Have a nice set of beads on hand to work with. But use caution when buying online. "Unless you're using a major online resource — buyse beads when using online services," said Blevins.

who buys her beads and gemstones in person.

6. Browse the Internet and jewelry magazines for tips and techniques.

7. Don't be overwhelmed. There are so many different techniques to learn and try. Keep practicing and ask for help.

— Katie Kalvaitis