



A DIAMOND JUBILEE

WALTER J. COOK JEWELER CELEBRATES ITS 75TH ANNIVERSARY

It's fitting that a legacy jewelry store should celebrate a diamond jubilee, marking 75 years of business serving the Main Line. Diamonds are, in fact, a key part of the business, and it's the intense sparkle from diamond jewelry that immediately catches your eye as you enter the Walter J. Cook Jeweler showroom in Paoli.

"We do have an extensive collection of diamonds and other precious gemstones," says Michael Cook, son of the founder, Walter, and owner of the company since 1995.

Are there special lights that account for the striking brightness and vibrant colors of the stones, we ask. "No, it's the quality," says Michael simply, remembering the lessons his father passed down.

We stopped in to learn more about this independently owned jewelry store's staying power when so many other luxury businesses have closed. So, how does this second-generation jeweler not just survive but thrive? "We're grateful for our loyal clientele and friends on the Main Line and surrounding area who have voted us the Best Jewelry Store on the Main Line so many times," says Michael.

The roots of the business date back to 1946, when Michael's father, Walter, returned from the war after serving in the Navy and opened a watch repair kiosk in a small local department store in Bryn Mawr. Walter had apprenticed as a watchmaker while in high school and used that skill to start a business to support his growing family. (Michael is the sixth and youngest child.)

The business grew, becoming a jewelry store and moved west to Paoli in 1954. The final move came in 1999, just across the street to the showroom's present location in the Chestnut Village Shoppes.

Michael began working in the shop at a young age. "I grew up in the business, starting around age 12," he says. At one point, his father insisted he work elsewhere—to gain perspective and make certain this was the career he wanted to pursue. Returning to the family business in 1981, Michael and his wife, Louise, purchased the business in 1995.

With the economic downturn of 2008 still fresh in so many people's memory, businesses are now challenged with the effects of the pandemic. Michael shared the two main reasons he attributes to his long-term success—changing with the times and offering exemplary customer service.

"We've evolved with the times," he says. "We may be 75 years in business, but that doesn't make us old-fashioned. And we realize tastes are changing all the time. Our customers want more than statement gold pieces and pearls. That's why we have a wide selection of carefully curated jewelry."

To keep the jewelry selection fresh, Michael and his staff travel to trade shows a few times a year. "We attend these shows to source new and upcoming designers and to observe jewelry trends. I look for better quality, one-of-a-kind and limited-production pieces," says Michael.

Half of the jewelry cases reflect stunning pieces by contemporary designers. The jewelry ranges from the sensual and tactile modernism of Turkish designer Lika Behar to the colorful precious gemstones designed by SUNA Bros, a second-generation family of jewelers in New York. "You'll find 'Today's Treasures

and Tomorrow's Heirlooms' wherever you look," says Michael.

A selection of giftware makes up a smaller, yet integral part of the business and includes baby and hostess gifts that appeal to all generations. "Not everything is sterling silver baby cups and picture frames now. These cheese trays, for example, are made of wood from a reclaimed French wine barrel," says Michael as he points out the warm color, texture and burnished Vineyard Logo.

When asked about customer experience, Michael says he serves three generations of customers, and some with the fourth generation in tow.

Every customer receives the special Michael Cook touch—with personal care and service. "It's my personal goal to greet everyone, to talk with them and thank them for their support. I've known so many for such a long time. While some customers may have moved from the area, many still return or call for special purchases," he says.

A second-generation customer came in while we visited, so we were able to observe Michael check in with her as she worked with his long-term staff, some with over 40 years' experience in the business.

To understand Michael's view of his business, he explained, only partly in jest, that he couldn't understand why Governor Wolf declared that jewelers were not essential businesses during the pandemic. To meet that challenge, Michael offered curbside service and private showings for those with "jewelry emergencies."

When asked for examples of customer service above and beyond, Michael answered, "Every day!" Whether it's crafting a one-of-a-kind piece, making a special delivery at a rehearsal dinner, or dealing with pandemic limitations, he finds a way.

And he's finding a way to mark this 75th milestone year—but postponing the celebration until 2022. It will be the "75th and 1" celebration in spring 2022, with an anniversary sale, trunk show and more. Check the website and billboard at Routes 30 & 252 for details of more glittering things to come. ♦

Walter J. Cook Jeweler, 36 Chestnut Road, Paoli. 610-644-5347 — WalterJCookJeweler.com

