

Milford bead shop finds success

By FRANK JULIANO
Staff writer

Kristin Laviola isn't the type of person to string someone along.

So when she and her husband, Chris, reopened their popular Manifest Beads shop at its new location, customers quickly got the word and followed them.

"This is a lot bigger than the other place," said Donna Schultz, of Milford. "I love the unique jewelry pieces they have; they are like modern art."

Sonia Furlo, of Orange, had been doing bead work on her own, but was glad to find the Laviolas' shop. "I've made an ankle bracelet on my own, but it is nice to have someone to take you through it."

That's a feeling that Kristin Laviola can relate to. She left a high-pressure job at Bridgeport Hospital to open the business six years ago. "I find jewelry making and beading to be a good way to relax.

"But when I looked around I found that there really wasn't anywhere to get really high quality supplies," the owner said.

"I'd been doing it as a hobby for eight to ten years; I like jewelry and making pretty things," she said. "But I thought if I'm having trouble finding materials other people must too."

Manifest Beads carries the Swarovski crystal line and many of the store's clients are prospective brides and members of the wedding party, Chris Laviola said.

A chance to make unique bridesmaids gifts or wedding accessories, or even to have a bachelorette-type party at the store are among the offerings in that area. Of course, busy brides can just design pieces and hire the Laviolas to make them.

Another service is the making and repairing of rosary beads. Kristin Laviola designs "family rosaries" with each decade in the birthstone of a parent or child, or pairs with glass, silver or wood beads. She'll even repair the beads. "Another thing we do is custom jewelry; you can come in and make a piece to go with a specific outfit."

The new store, on the ground level of the Yankee Professional Building, has several rows of bins holding brightly colored beads or all types and sizes, while thread, string and metal clips to join them are in cabinets on the walls. There are several work benches with lights and mirrors; one looks like the table an optometrist uses to fit a pair of glasses for a patient. A comfortable sofa is in the front of the beige and burgandy room.

Classes for all experience levels are taught by several instructors, on how to make everything from chunky chain necklaces to Russian leaf earrings, along with charm bracelets, rosary beads and mixed-media items.

Chris Laviola said that Milford is getting a reputation as a town that appreciates arts and crafts, and that downtown is becoming a niche for such businesses.

The classes So when her popular shop, Manifest Beads, reopened at its new location last month she organized a schedule of classes in everything from jewelry making to crocheting with beads.

The classes for beginners, intermediate and expert hobbyists are held at Laviola's shop, 51 River St. downtown.

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