



By Rosanne McDowell

It's 4 a.m., and the downstairs lights are on at the Weinisch house. The neighbors know it's probably Shoshannah making up a rush order for her thriving handcrafted jewelry business, Shosh Jewels, now 10 years old and steadily growing. Her desk covered with Bali sterling, rose quartz and pearls, fingers deftly working a pattern of her own design, Shosh plans the day ahead: Fix breakfast, see the kids off to school, discuss with her pastor husband Stewart how things are going, call vendors for supplies, ship the just-finished orders and work on next season's designs. Busy—and she loves it.

“At really busy times, I'll go to bed at 2 a.m., sleep two or three hours and get up again at 4 or 5 to make jewelry,” she says.

With 17 independently owned stores (and counting) in the Carolinas and a growing list of retailers in other states now carrying her creations, Shosh easily could push too hard. “Stewart keeps me balanced; he pulls me back when I overdo it.” Fortunately, not every day is hectic and Shosh, an energetic 51, has more time for family and ministry duties than when she worked as a full-time office manager and sales

A GEM of a Business

rep outside the home—another benefit of her Mt. Pleasant home business.

Shoshannah's strength is design—she was an art major at the College of San Mateo in California—but she knows and works in every aspect of her business. How does she get it all done?

It's a family enterprise. Stewart helps by stamping her name on the charming tiny sterling tags Shosh attaches to nearly every piece she makes. “He's also great on general business advice,” she confides,



Shoshannah Weinisch takes pleasure as well as pride in her Mt. Pleasant home business. The dazzling creations of Shosh Jewels are sold in a growing number of retail outlets in multiple states.

noting that Stewart's business skill has benefited both Shosh Jewels and Beth Shofar, the congregation he pastors using the facilities of Mt. Pleasant's First Baptist Church. "Stewart and I pray over my business together, trusting God to bless." Son Jonathan, a competent electronics "techie" at 16, keeps Shoshannah's computers and cameras running smoothly. Daughter Melissa, 18, has modeled jewelry for some of Shosh's ads and helped string. Others Shosh has trained lend a hand as needed.

When did the business germinate? Way back. Like mother, like daughter. In her earliest years, Shosh loved to root through her mom's jewelry box. Later she evidenced artistic leanings. Shosh made pin money by handpainting sweatshirts and T-shirts for Nordstrom's Seattle store. "They sold well, but it took about eight hours to produce one article of clothing. It was too much labor for the \$50 I got for each piece." She gave up that venture, but it was a stimulus that eventually led to Shosh Jewels.

As often happens, personal need got the transplanted New Yorker started in her current business. "My first attempt was a necklace I made to go with a dress I wanted to wear on a dinner date with Stewart. I had searched for a suitable necklace, but everything I liked was out of my price range. My solution was to make my own." As Shosh wore the necklace, several women asked her to make copies for them. Grati- fied but short on time, she had to refuse. Later, she made

one for a friend and charged just for materials. But the compliments and requests kept coming. Shoshannah progressed by customer demand from necklaces to earrings to bracelets and, finally, anklets. All are available separately or in matched sets.

Occasionally, she picks up on trends. She created a commemorative Cooper River Bridge charm bracelet (a recent commission from a Charleston fine

jewelry store to celebrate the opening of the city's Arthur Ravenel Bridge) and her Hope bracelet (for breast cancer awareness). But generally, she sticks to updating versions of classics. "My bread-and-butter pieces are Jeretta, Markus, Glacier and Jelly Bean," she says. "Most of them are made of neutrals—silver, gold, pearls, crystals—and go with nearly everything. This is what my customer is looking for."

That doesn't mean her designs are old hat. On the contrary, Shosh has a way of matching up old friends like freshwater pearls with Bali sterling or Swarovski crystals (or both, as with

her Black and White) that makes them sparkle with freshness. She also uses semiprecious stones, 14K gold-filled products and strong, top-quality jeweler's wire.

"One of my reps tells me my jewelry is addicting," she says, smiling. "I've always wanted it to be an affordable addiction, however! For that reason, when I began the business, I chose to work with semiprecious rather than precious stones. I also wanted my pieces to be unique, not cookie-cutter copies of

When she began designing handcrafted jewelry, staying at home and working with her hands were high priorities for Shoshannah Weinisch. Now she enjoys both.



jewelry you see everywhere. I've tried to stick to these guideposts, and they've worked well for me and those who wear my jewelry.

"And my customers come up with some of my best designs! For example, Eleanor Pitts of Pawleys Island asked if I could twist three Jeretta pearl-and-silver necklaces together into one necklace for her shop. The result was a gorgeous new piece we named Eleanor after her."

In response to another customer request, Shosh created a Charleston-themed charm bracelet that took off in the port city. Now Columbia has a specialty bracelet with a South Carolina State House charm.



Recently, Shosh helped a troop of Girl Scouts earn a badge in jewelry making. The creation of a Hope bracelet was each Scout's aim, and the girls of Cadette Girl Scout Troop 557 of Summerville tackled the job with enthusiasm. "Before we went to work, we talked about my philosophy of entrepreneurship. For example, how important it is to have a passion for what you do? I also told them to learn to love reading, because if they can read, they can teach themselves almost anything. The neatest thing was that the girls were invited to a Breast Cancer Survivors' support group the following month, where they presented the bracelets they made to each of the survivors there."

A firm believer in giving back to the community and beyond, Shoshannah donates a portion of the proceeds from her Hope breast-cancer awareness bracelet to the Susan G. Komen Foundation.

The word about Shosh's abilities as a presenter is spreading. She already has helped a second Scout troop earn the same badge, and Wando High School in Mt. Pleasant twice has invited her to speak to its entrepreneur class.

Sometimes unusual things happen to Shosh's jewelry. "One customer bought my World Trade Center bracelet—designed in the wake of 9/11—to put in a time capsule for a baby's christening. The customer felt that when the child reached 18 and opened the capsule, she would find the bracelet to be a wearable work of art, as well as a reminder of an important historic event that took place the year she was born."

What's next?

Attending trade shows and increasing her roster of sales representatives to keep up with her growing list of retail outlets, for starters. "The team of stay-at-home Charleston-area moms I also hope to employ, in addition to workers at a main facility, will particularly appreciate the flexible hours I plan to offer," Shosh believes. "My administrator will oversee their work, while I concentrate on design."

Now that her children are older, Shosh is pushing ahead with her long-range plan. In June she unveiled a showroom on the second

floor of The Brickhouse in Mt. Pleasant, open by appointment.

When she began her venture, she wanted to accomplish several things: to be at home with the children, to work with her hands and to add to the family's income. She has achieved all of these goals with her jewelry business. Her customers agree she has accomplished at least one other thing: the creation of uniquely lovely jewelry that is a pleasure to look at and a joy to wear. ❖

Columbia writer Rosanne McDowell covered Singing Oakes Garden in the summer Sandlapper. She loves having Shosh jewelry to match practically every outfit.

For more information about Shosh Jewels, visit www.shoshjewels.com or the showroom at 1465 Stuart Engels Boulevard in Mt. Pleasant; phone (877) 971-3966.