

Great love makes a good story (think Romeo and Juliet, Odysseus and Penelope, Lady and the Tramp), and fine jewelry frequently plays a role in making romantic relationships even sweeter. What romantic tale doesn't involve some sort of jewelry gift? From the Hollywood elite to the neighbor next door, love drives sales of many a diamond pendant, pair of earrings, strand of pearls, and every diamond engagement ring sold.

BY JENNIFER HEEBNER AND PAUL HOLEWA,
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Romancing the Jewelry Shopper

Jewelers know a lot about love—it brings customers through their doors every day. Without love as the main motivator behind sales, most might not ever occur.

To that end, *JCK* celebrates that powerful emotion and driving force in our business: love and romance. They are responsible for the sale of wedding bands, birthday bracelets, anniversary pendants and three-stone rings, push presents, “just because” gifts, and “get out of the doghouse” offerings, all of which give jewelers a livelihood and the rest of the world a shot at happily ever after. Here’s to the jewelers who drive home the romance message and spread that “loving feeling” year round.



These jewelers know a little 'bout love (and baby they can guess the rest.)



COVER STORY

ROMANCING THE CUSTOMER



look for feel-good Valentine's Day stories.

People from many walks of life take advantage of the services offered by the Halperns and the Davids, including couples renewing their vows as well as first timers. "Some couples show up in jeans and casual clothes, while other couples get married in tuxedos and traditional wedding dresses," says David. "We've even had a policeman and nurse married in their uniforms." —PH

CHIEF ROMANCE EXPERT

—**Craig Husar**, Lyle Husar Designs, Brookfield, Wis.

Three years ago, Craig Husar became a Hearts On Fire dealer, learning a new way to sell diamonds. "It was a huge paradigm shift for us," says the president of Lyle Husar Designs. "To truly romance a diamond, it required no facts or figures at all; we were selling the sizzle behind the product."

Down from the countertops went Husar's microscopes and away went his GIA charts. The second-generation jeweler even started joking with customers that his job was more about selling romantic ideas for couples than jewelry—an idea that he took a step further by emblazoning business cards with the title Chief Romance Expert. Husar enjoyed watching customers' reactions as they read the card. "Consumers would laugh a knowing laugh, because they knew why [that title] was there. The very notion of giving a piece of jewelry to a loved one is romantic."

As the economy tanked and competitors lowered prices, Husar held firm on his prices and sharpened the romance message even more (his store tag line is "Where women get into trouble and men get out of it"). He redesigned his store to feature private consultation areas tucked away in discrete corners and set up seating to accommodate two at a time and encourage intimate conversations. Curved glass display cases are etched with words like *intoxicating*, *unforgettable*, and *forever* to subliminally suggest romantic notions, and Husar's salespersons became storytellers to help create connections with merchandise. Sales presentations



IN-STORE WEDDINGS

—**Josh Halpern**, Albert's Jewelers, Schererville, Ind.;

—**Leon and Mark David**, Ben David Jewelers, Danville, Va.

Fred Halpern, owner of Albert's Jewelers, married his wife on Valentine's Day. Years later, when Halpern was celebrating a milestone anniversary, a friend who was a justice of the peace offered to renew the couple's wedding vows. The proposal was open-ended, allowing the Halperns to renew their vows with six other couples exchanging theirs for the first time. And with that anniversary celebration an annual store event was born.

For over 15 years, in-store weddings have been a Valentine's Day staple for Halpern and his staff. As members of the Leading Jewelers Guild, Halpern and his son Joshua shared their in-store wedding event idea with other retailers, including Leon and Mark David of Ben David Jewelers. Both stores have become synonymous with in-store Valentine's Day weddings with the David brothers doing their fourth next month.

From flowers, photographers, and a justice of the peace (or pastor) to champagne, cake, and food,

the requisites of a wedding and a reception are wedged into 30 minutes. Partnering with local support industries provides a complete wedding-day experience for the couples and also minimizes costs.

Each store does the weddings a little differently. Halpern and his staff bring in three justices of the peace with the goal of marrying 25 to 30 couples, more if possible. The David brothers bring in one justice and schedule about 12 couples.

Both stores have lounges that convert into makeshift wedding and reception areas. Near the back of Ben David Jewelers' Danville, Va., store is a customer lounge with a large brick hearth and mantle built into a corner space. Furniture is cleared from the sitting area, and the adjoining beverage area allows drinks and food to be served.

At Albert's Jewelers the 15-foot by 15-foot customer lounge is converted into Chapel de Fred, where the wedding ceremonies and receptions take place. The store has a hardwood floor area that functions as a dance floor.

Both jewelers aggressively promote the events, opening their stores to customers and others. The in-store weddings garner media attention, as TV and radio stations as well as newspapers



Couples from all walks of life take advantage of **Ben David Jewelers'** in-store wedding ceremonies held each Valentine's Day.



COVER STORY

ROMANCING THE CUSTOMER



Glass display cases at **Lyle Husar Designs** are etched with evocative words like *intoxicating*.

even include instructions on how to present gifts to recipients. "I have salespeople repeat relevant stories to their customers as an example of how something special was given by others," Husar says.

Fans of Lyle Husar Designs on Facebook are encouraged to post names of romantic restaurants and music titles, and a recent promotion challenged consumers to send in love stories for a chance to win a Tacori double heart necklace. Husar read all 75 entries, and so did his sales force.

"I try to help [my salespeople] understand how they're making an impact on people's lives," Husar says. "People come to us on a weekly basis to thank us for helping them give a gift in a unique and memorable way. Prior to the [romance] campaign, [Lyle Husar Designs] was thought of as a jewelry store destination, but now we are the place to come to celebrate romance and romantic occasions." —JH

PROPOSAL PLANNING KIT

—**Ronda Daily**, Bremer Jewelry, Peoria, Ill.

Ronda Daily has a firm policy at her store. A gentleman buying an engagement ring can't leave Bremer Jewelry without at least some idea of how to propose to his intended. Daily is so dedicated to being a romance-friendly store for men that she recently had the store repainted in red and brown color schemes. "Guys find these colors comfortable and relaxing," Daily says.

Daily and her predominantly female staff know a woman's expectations when a man opens a small ring box. "When a woman tells her friends she got engaged, they ask two questions," says Daily. "First, they want to see the ring, and then they want to know how he proposed."

The Peoria, Ill., jeweler is as passionate about proposal planning as she is about the jewelry that takes



Pages from **Ronda Daily's** Proposal Planning Kit created by **Fruchtmann Marketing**.

center stage when a gentleman pops the question. The proposals that she's helped prepare run the gamut from romantic and intimate to humorous and offbeat.

Daily works well with her customers' ideas, which have included a man dressing up in a monkey costume with a sign reading "I'm ape over you" and contacting the manager at a couple's favorite restaurant and adding some personal elements to a special dinner menu and romantic touches during the meal. But like any good coach, Daily also has a number of strategies in her playbook.

The Proposal Planning Kit was developed for Daily and her staff by Fruchtmann Marketing. Designed with a football theme, the 24-page kit contains everything from product information on diamonds and precious metals to a host of wedding proposal ideas. It concludes with a checklist to make sure a young suitor is dealing with a reputable jeweler, whether brick-and-mortar or online.

Even the most romance-challenged guy can't miss with the wedding proposal essentials in Daily's parting gift bag: a split of champagne, two flute glasses bearing the store's name, a chocolate cake in a decorative box, and two small plates. "With that a guy can't mess up," says Daily.

The most fun Daily has had was helping a romance-challenged man be "that guy" with an über-romantic proposal. Daily organized a dinner at the restaurant where the couple had their first date. A carriage was outfitted with a portable CD player so he could propose with "their



song" playing in the background. Flowers added the final romantic touch to a moonlit ride along a river.

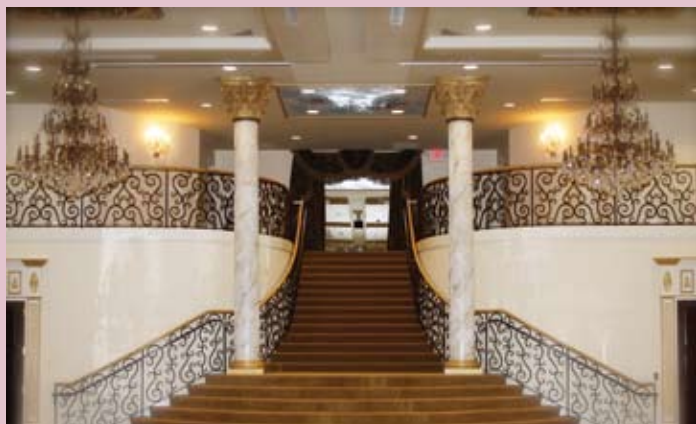
Another favorite was a proposal for a man who wanted a sequence of pictures showing his fiancée's reaction to his proposal. Daily helped arrange a photo shoot with his girlfriend's dog. A box on the dog's collar held the ring. When she opened the box the photographer shot a rapid series that captured her jubilation, second by second. "The resulting sequential images when framed were very special," says Daily. "I still can't believe it worked out as well as it did." —PH

BALLROOM FOR BRIDES

—**Anfesa Matthews**, Anfesa's Jewelers, Garner, N.C.

Anfesa's Jewelers' recent store upgrade makes sense when you consider the store's mantra: "The wedding begins and ends with a ring." This is why the 17-year-old business moved from a strip mall in a suburb of Raleigh, N.C., to a newly built freestanding 20,000-square-foot romance destination in Garner, N.C. The store includes a ballroom and banquet facilities, jewelry showroom, and day spa. Store owner Anfesa Matthews built it to provide residents with an elegant, fairy-tale-like venue as grand as falling in love itself. "Romance is how we sell our product," she says. "People are buying jewelry for the people they love."

The doors of Anfesa's Jewelers and the Grand Marquise Ballroom opened Sept. 1, 2009, astounding residents of the town of 26,000 so much that they questioned their humble hamlet as the most sensible location. "People say, 'You put this in Garner?'" says Matthews.



A staircase worthy of Scarlet O'Hara leads to the banquet area at **Anfesa's Jewelers**.

But she did, intending to make guests feel like royalty. This is why the ballroom is outfitted with six 7-foot-tall crystal chandeliers and 11 4-foot-tall wall sconces, a 20-foot by 20-foot marble dance floor, private dressing quarters for the bride and groom, and colored lights that coordinate with bridal party attire and accessories. A full kitchen allows brides to bring in their own caterer or select one that contracts with Matthews, while a 2,800-square-foot day spa enables everyone in the party to relax before the festivities. (Matthews sublets the space to professional massage therapists and hair and makeup experts who work their magic on patrons.) The pièce de résistance is a sweeping staircase flanked by marble columns that leads to the banquet area and dance floor. "The ballroom looks like it was ripped out of *Gone With the Wind*," the owner says proudly.

Everything from rings, bridal party gifts, reception space, and cake topper can be purchased at the new location. The ballroom can hold 425 people, and not just wedding guests. (Matthews hosted a tea party in October to mark Breast Cancer Awareness Month.)

A bonus for brides: They can rent high-end jewelry to wear on their wedding day. "The idea is to sell jewelry, of course, but not everyone can afford a \$25,000 necklace," says Matthews. "My vendors help us treat our customers just like Hollywood stars and New York socialites by lending high-end pieces."

Word of the new spot has spread to some of the state's most illustrious residents. According to

Matthews, Miss North Carolina has booked her wedding reception at the ballroom. Matthews expects more North Carolinians to follow suit. "People are always going to get married," she says.—JH

VIP TREATMENT

—**Steven Singer**, Steven Singer Jewelers, Philadelphia

Steven Singer is out to reduce the percentage of customers who purchase an engagement ring at a jewelry store and don't return for the wedding bands—or any other jewelry.

Five or six times a year, usually on a Sunday, the owner of Steven Singer Jewelers invites to the store recent engagement-ring customers for a day of pampering and what he calls "the most fun you'll ever have buying a diamond."

Food and refreshments are

Steven Singer Jewelers has horse-drawn carriage rides every Wednesday night and at special parties held just for bridal jewelry customers.



served while customers move from case to case looking at wedding bands and other jewelry. Treats for the couples include a free engagement photograph by Shea Roggio Weddings and a horse-drawn carriage ride by the 76 Carriage Company, which also does carriage rides for the jeweler every Wednesday night.

Mixing romance with fun, the store also holds raffles. "We mainly give away swag from local sports teams," says marketing manager LeeAnn Jacobs.

The events provide a way to promote new collections and the latest designs. In late October the store's fall event featured naked settings for diamonds. "This is a new prongless setting that allows the diamond to be set in such a way that the stone can be viewed from every angle," says Jacobs. "The diamond literally sparkles no matter what angle you look at it."

Singer has held large-scale events for five years and smaller variations on the theme for 29. On average, 100 couples attend, but Valentine's Day and spring events attract slightly more interest.

"It has been a real boon for us," says Jacobs. "Over the years, we've seen a tremendous increase of couples returning to Steven Singer Jewelers for their wedding jewelry, and that means we have a greater opportunity to keep them as customers throughout their lives together."—PH

FREE HONEYMOON

—**John Carter**, Jack Lewis Fine Jewelry, Bloomington, Ill.

In October, John Carter, owner of



Jack Lewis Fine Jewelry's billboards promote their honeymoon giveaway.

Jack Lewis Fine Jewelry, began a new ad campaign that may lead to a new store policy: Every couple that buys an engagement ring receives a free honeymoon.

Through an employee-incentive company based in Canada, Carter is able to give away a three-day honeymoon to Las Vegas, Cancun, or on a cruise ship, at a cost of \$200. Carter estimates that a couple's perceived value of the trip is five times that amount. That perception usually stops all discussions of discounting the jewelry.

"I actually save money by giving the honeymoon away," says Carter. "The giveaway also saves us from having to have to discuss reducing the price of the ring during the associate's sales presentation to the customer. And the free honeymoon has more of a lasting impact on the customer's wedding-day memories, instead of a one-time discount on the day they purchased the engagement ring."

Carter is promoting the free honeymoon with billboard taglines such as "We'll float your cruise boat." He's also airing ads on local radio stations and using Facebook to get the word out.

To help create the casual and relaxed environment that Carter prefers, he keeps a wide range of domestic and imported beers on hand for clients, with an emphasis on exotic Belgian beers. "When a couple comes into the store we always offer them a beer or a drink or whatever beverage they want to make the sale presentation feel like a conversation between friends over a drink," says Carter. "It really helps disarm the whole diamond selling process."—PH