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We mean business in St. Charles County



*Melinda Nolan, Owner
Roemer Originals*

Divine Designs

Entrepreneur Melinda Nolan creates jewelry as a form of expression

Story by Robin Jefferson

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Melinda Nolan took her love of jewelry and spun it into a career and a way of life. A business graduate from Truman State University in Kirksville, Nolan worked as a salesperson for over 10 years before taking a job with Bruce Roemer at Roemer Originals.

"Since I was a little girl, I always loved jewelry and gemstones," Nolan said. "I started learning how to build pieces in 1997."

Before then, jewelry design had just been a hobby—a special interest and past time for Nolan. Then she attended classes at Craft Alliance in University City. "They teach people how to make jewelry, torch-worked beads, glass fusing, sculpting, painting and drawing."

Knowing that she didn't want to stay in field sales forever, Nolan applied for a job helping with sales and design at Roemer Originals in St. Charles. Three months after she was hired, Bruce Roemer moved to Florida. The fine jewelry store has been in business since 1975. After four years with Roemer's, Nolan purchased the store from Bruce Roemer, upon his retirement.

The daughter of two small business owners, Jeff and Marge Ploudre, Melinda knew the dedication and fortitude it took to own and operate a business. Her parents had owned Countryside Gardens Nursery in Florissant for many years. They closed the store when she was in high school.

"I had gotten to a point after 10 years of sales, that I wasn't satisfied with what I was doing. I thought, 'Why am I doing something I don't have a passion for instead of something I love,'" Nolan said. "Bruce was known for custom jewelry and was the only one in this area at the time."

Nolan said she had learned many other industries through sales. She started in inside and telephone sales and then went



into outside sales in printing, office and industrial supplies.

"I needed to find a way to get more creative. There were only so many ways you could be creative in those industries," Nolan said. "Roemer's offered a great opportunity to turn my hobby into a career and use the talent that God gave me."

Nolan said it is the uniqueness of Roemer Originals and what they produce that sets them apart from other jewelry stores. "What we mean by 'custom design' is that the customers are actually designing their own piece.

When we're finished making it, they have a piece of jewelry they've created that uniquely expresses their style."

Nolan employs one full time and two part time designers, two craftsmen and one repair person. "It's so important to have the right people on your team. Luz, Babette and my son, Tom are all really great at serving the customers." Wax carving, casting, finishing, setting of stones and engraving are done by our jewelers. "It's very difficult to find people who are experts in this art," Nolan said. "Master craftsmen are hard to come by."

A couple of patented features also make Roemer Originals unique. For instance, the counter balanced shank of the ring and the small diamond in the shank are trademarks of Roemer pieces. "Every piece we make is not only a hand carved original, but the rings also have these two patented features built into the design."

Nolan has been married to Tom Nolan since 1994. The two have three children. Their son, Tom, has been working at the store for over a year and is learning the business. It's been a family adventure where everyone has helped at one time or another to pull it all together.

Nolan's husband owns and operates his own business as well - Handling and Storage Concepts - a forklift dealership.





"He has been totally supportive. Together, we put up everything to do this. We took the leap."

Nolan said she works six days a week at her business. "I knew growing up what that was like," she said. "I remember helping at the nursery as young as 10 or 11 years old. I learned the work ethic from my parents and my husband. The concept was very familiar to me."

Still, she tries to balance work and family. "I try not to work from home and try to take every Sunday off," she said.

Doing engagement and wedding sets is the most touching part of the job. "To watch the thrill of a new couple getting engaged and how much they glow is very special," she said. "We actually got to be a part of one proposal here at the store."

Nolan's favorite pieces are the ones created from things of the past. "Customers can have a one of a kind piece restyled from other pieces that have been passed down from a loved one. It is so much more exciting than watching them pick something out of the case."

Roemer Originals will take a client's old pieces of jewelry, melt down the gold, and restyle the stones into an original piece that melds all of the sentimentality of the past with the style of the present wearer. "Jewelry is a form of expression. We each buy things that convey our own personality and style."

Nolan said that Roemer Originals set the standard for all the custom jewelers that would follow in St. Charles County. "For a long time we were the first and only place building custom pieces. A lot of places this side of the river actually spawned off of Roemer's. There are four stores in the area that were started by people who actually worked for Bruce. Bruce can take that as a really big compliment. He knew how to train people."

Her parents and her husband were a "huge influence" on the business woman Melinda Nolan would become. "My faith has also put me here. All I can do is my best and after

that, the rest is up to God. I don't have control over so many of the things in my life which can make it easy to lay awake at night worrying. The best way to get past that is to realize you only have so much control."

Nolan said most of her clientele are the young marrying crowd in their twenties and those in their forties and fifties who have worked long enough to have a little extra disposable income that they can finally spend on themselves.

A particularly special client is an older woman who has designed and collected many Roemer pieces throughout the years. "She and her husband never liked to travel, just stayed close to home, loved to eat out and buy jewelry. She also loves to treat our staff to fresh baked deserts."

Nolan said that Roemer's is a second generation business now. "Parents now bring in their son or daughter to design rings. It's the easiest sale in the world. They're not going anywhere else. There's no 'work' to it. It's fun helping them design a piece they'll love as much as their parents loved theirs."

Nolan said she loves to support other small business owners in the area. "To us, small business in the community is very important and we support the people who are our neighbors," she added that supporting the local charities is just as important. Roemer's gives to The American Diabetes Association, Youth in Need, Big Brothers Big Sisters, Crown Financial Ministries, Harvester Christian Church, and Our Little Haven, to mention a few.

She said she knows giving to those in need is part of her faith. It's what keeps her on the right track personally and professionally. "Making everyday business decisions and how to handle them can be tough. It could be easy to be unethical in the jewelry industry. Every decision we make from the smallest to the largest is made in a biblical and ethical manner. They ask me, I ask Him...a lot." 🍷