

— YELLOW SPRINGS —

Multi-tasking for fun and profit — heavy on fun

GREENET ★
Greene County Network of
Community Correspondents

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Yellow Springs is collectively delighted to be miles away from the nearest mall. What it boasts instead is a charming little greensward, entered from Xenia Avenue by way of a small gateway between two buildings, called Kings Yard.

A seven-foot-high signboard at the entrance is a menu of the shops that surround the Yard. Often on a summer evening, the lawn is the scene of a concert by one of the many music groups that flourish in the village.

Tucked into a back corner of Kings Yard is Rita Caz Jewelry Studio and Gallery, Inc. There is no one named Rita Caz, never was. The name was made up of the surname initials of the shop's founders, Mark Crockett, his wife Gail Zimmerman, and the late Luigi Acamito.

Crockett and Zimmerman now run the shop with the help of four other artists, all accomplished in jewelry making and design.

A multitasked entrepreneur

As the principal jewelry designer, maker, and repairman, Crockett spends most of his time having fun. He also is an accomplished musician, so, to increase the fun, he sells high-quality musical instruments, mostly guitars, acoustic and electric. Names like Martin, Gibson, and Epiphone appear on many labels.

Both Crockett and wife Zimmerman are 1974 graduates of Wright State University, he with a BA in Art specializing in painting, she with a Bachelor of Fine Arts specializing in printmaking.

"I was hooked on music from high school on," Crockett says. "From my early teens I went to every blues concert I could find. The instruments I sell in the shop are a result of that passion."

After graduation and working in area jewelry shops for several years, Crockett moved to Arizona to attend graduate school. But he soon tired of formal education, and in 1975 he moved back to Yellow Springs, married Gail Zimmerman, and bought a house in the village.

He worked at Cab-N-Facet Jewelry Co. in Springfield until 1986, when he ventured with Zimmerman and Luigi Acamito to open Rita Caz on Dayton Street in Yellow Springs. In 1989 they moved the store to its current location in Kings Yard.

"Everything we do here is enjoyable," he says, "but I guess my favorite activity is talking to people who come into the shop. Just interacting with them is fun, and some of their life stories are fascinating!"

Custom jewelry design and execution take up most of Crockett's time. His shop in the back of the store is like a prototype of the old German watchmaker's milieu. Precision tools, blocks and strips of precious metal, mostly silver, and gemstones of various colors, shapes, and sizes litter the area.

"It looks pretty messy," he says with a grin, "but I don't think of that when I'm working on a piece. This is my art, and it consumes me!"

Many choices,
many charms

The variety of items for sale in the store is mind-boggling. Showcases of rings, pendants, earrings, bracelets, charms, miniature sculptures, colorful mineral samples, musical instruments, pottery, and dozens of other categories of collectibles make the shop resemble a combination museum and art gallery.

Boxes and display cases of polished stones abound. Large and small geodes glitter in the display lighting. Mounted and unmounted gemstones share shelves with finely articulated creations in sterling silver.

A large section of the store is devoted to guitars, banjos, drums, amplifiers, tuning instruments, and pennywhistles. Shelves are crammed with books on music playing, musical instruments, minerals, jewelry making, gemstones, and dozens of other subjects.

The walls are festooned with paintings, printed posters and ancient documents, and caricatures of Crockett and other musicians.

In the shop, Crockett is usually smiling. He appears to be a most happy fella.

"It's a pretty good life," he observes. "I enjoy working with everything in this place. I love working with my wife, and she enjoys it as well. The other artists working here are great people, and the customers are delightful."

"I've thought about retiring, and I actually worried about it for a while. Then I realized that I'm just not going to do that. I'll be here, happy as a lark, as long as I can work!"

Ron Siemer writes about Yellow Springs each Friday. Deadline to submit information to Ron is 4 p.m. Monday prior to publication.

Want more?

See more of Ron Siemer's Yellow Springs photos on Page 9A.



Item no. 6 on the signboard introducing Kings Yard is Rita Caz, a landmark for locals and out-of-town visitors.



The colorful entrance to Rita Caz is as inviting as its richly varied interior.



A business card for Rita Caz features the silhouette of a woman reputed to have been an entrepreneur of doubtful character in Bowling Green, KY.



Mark Crockett and wife Gail Zimmerman have been proprietors of Rita Caz since 1986. Left: Wall displays feature specialty items made by individual jewelry artists.

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