

SUCCESS

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Entrepreneur of the Month

Connelly's Diamond Gallery

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Entrepreneur of the Month

Connelly's Diamond Gallery

Success Magazine: Dennis, how do you define success?

Dennis Connelly: I define success as making something out of nothing. I opened Connelly's Diamond Gallery in 1995 to provide for my family by doing something I love. In the fourteen years we've been open, I've been able to not only provide for my wife and children

but also to make life-long friends and bring joy to others.

SM: What is your background in the retail industry?

DC: I started at a Zales jewelry store in 1984. I learned quickly that the jewelry business was for me. I moved into management within one year and relocated to Boston to manage a store there. In Boston, I met a manufacturer named Steve Applebaum whom offered me a sales position. This was a great opportunity for me to learn how to make jewelry and design one-of-a-kind pieces. I was very blessed to

have Steve as a mentor. I learned a lot from him. I moved back to Albany in 1985 but traveled the country doing jewelry shows. Four years later, I started my own jewelry design company. During this time I married my wife Cindy and we had four children: Regina, Nicholas, Dennis, and Daniella.

In 1994, I realized that I didn't want to travel anymore—my family was, and still is, the most important thing in my life. So by August of 1995, my wife and I opened Connelly's Diamond Gallery.

SM: Why did you choose your present location?

DC: I drove around the Albany area for days looking for the perfect location for my store. The truth is, I was coming down route 9 at around



midnight from a friend's birthday party, when I stopped at the light in front of Newton Plaza. I looked over and saw the space for rent sign. The light turned green, then red, then green... and I didn't move. I just stared at the plaza. I realized, after getting beeped at from some disgruntled drivers behind me, that it was time to turn in. The location just felt right...and the rest is history.

We actually stayed in that original location from 1995 to October of 2007. I then had the opportunity to move across the street to my present location next to Starbucks and Lollipops. Moving allowed me to build a bigger store and in turn, display more jewelry. My landlord Barry Larner has been so accommodating—without him I would not be here.

SM: You have undergone a major renovation. What are you focusing on as your market strategy?

DC: I believe in selling fine jewelry; pieces that can be handed down from generation to generation. My strategy is simple and I'm always preaching it to my employees: sell yourself, not the product; be yourself, and show people you care. The word spreads, and the growth is inevitable.

SM: What makes your store unique?

DC: Basically, we're friendly and fun. Connelly's Diamond Gallery has a very relaxed atmosphere. I guess jewelry stores can be intimidating, but we make it

enjoyable for our customers to be here.

SM: How do you attract your clients?

DC: I don't have the advertising budget of some stores, so my wife and I are very active in the community. We meet new people and make new friends every day. Besides, I'm the guy in the tuxedo on the billboard... you know "Have we met," "Carats are good for you." I have a saying: "You can be a magnet or manure." We definitely like being a magnet.





SM: What specialized services do you offer?

DC: We're a full service jewelry store. We offer quite a few designer lines that are unique to only Connelly's in the area. We also have a state-of-the-art jewelry design and repair center. I love to restyle people's jewelry. Many people will inherit jewelry that they will never wear because it's just not "them" or they've been married many years and want to update their older, dated pieces. We are very creative here. Sometimes I tell my wife and daughter that they are too creative and that we're jewelers, not magicians. Haha.

SM: What designer jewelry lines do you carry?

DC: We carry quite a few designer lines including Alwand Vahan, Parviz, Forum Design, Fendi, Versace, Frederick Duclos, and Chamilia to name a few.

SM: What role does your family play in your store?

DC: My wife Cindy and I started Connelly's Diamond Gallery in 1995. My eldest daughter Gina has worked with us since her freshmen year at Siena. She graduated in 2007 and is now taking GIA gemologist courses while working full-time at the store. She is such an asset to Cindy and me. The store would not be the same without her. My youngest son "little Dennis" is currently a senior and math major at Siena. He enjoys working part-time, so we'll see what the future holds for him. My eldest son Nicholas is currently in graduate school at UAlbany for their Nano-tech program. My youngest daughter Daniella is currently a freshman at Oneonta and wants to be a pastry chef. All of my family helps out if we need them. I am a very lucky man.

SM: How do you achieve balance and stress relief?

DC: I love tailgating at New York Giants football games. I have been a Giants fan for over twenty years. Three years ago, I actually bought an RV and had it custom painted with NY Giants logos, colors, and players. I was lucky enough to be at the NY Giants Albany training camp and had over twenty Giants players sign the RV. It's the only one like it in the world. I really enjoy the company of family, friends, and clients while tailgating for a couple hours before each Giants home game.

SM: Who is the boss?

A: That would have to be my wife. I think the movie "My Big Fat Greek Wedding" said it best: "The man is the head, but the woman is the neck and can turn the head any way she wants."

SM: How does the well-to-do area affect your market strategy?



DC: I must carry FINE jewelry. I do not like selling low-end, cheaply made jewelry. If a piece of jewelry is purchased from Connelly's Diamond Gallery, I know that person can wear it, show it off to friends and family and know they have a well made, fine piece that will last generations.

SM: How has the recession affected your business and plans?

DC: Anyone who owns a business must have "their house in order." I believe the fourth quarter will be stronger than last year's and I look forward to 2010

being a small growth year.

SM: What are your future plans?

DC: In January of 2010 we will be expanding some lines of jewelry and watches.... and I'm hoping to see the NY Giants in the Superbowl.

SM: Have you ever wanted to quit?

DC: No, no, no, never. I learned to never, EVER quit...to move forward always. I'll admit, at times it's been tough, but with my supportive family, we've always persevered.

SM: What qualities have helped you succeed in business and in life?

DC: I communicate very well. I like to make people smile and laugh. I think these are my best qualities.

SM: Do you have a mentor or business associate?

DC: I do—her name is Cindy. She's my wife and without her I wouldn't be here.

SM: What charities are you affiliated with?

DC: Charities are so important and we try to donate to local organizations as much as we can. The charities we are affiliated with are those that either touch our lives personally or those of our family, friends, and customers. We donate to several dozen charities annually especially Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation, Special Olympics, different cancer organizations, and local public and private schools and hospitals. If our donations can do anything to save or make even one life better, we've done our job.

SM: What one word best describes you?

DC: Charismatic.

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Mr. Newton joined Connelly's Diamond Gallery in 2007 and together we have created the region's most modern jewelry design and repair center by combining a traditional European style jewelry store with space-age technology- laser welding and setting under a medical quality microscope.

Laser Welding

- Brought to the area first by Connelly's Diamond Gallery
 - Allows restoration and repair of jewelry previously deemed unrepairable
- Connelly's Diamond Gallery features a 50inch television screen so customers can watch laser repairs being done on premise

Medical Quality Microscope

- Achieves far greater detail and perfection than traditional jewelry microscopes



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