

BANKING ON *Beads*

A College of Agriculture student designs and sells jewelry as a personal business

By Emily Schneider

Sterling silver, antique glass beads and semi-precious stones may not sound like things a typical college student would handle on a daily basis, but one College of Agriculture student is up to her ears in them — literally.

Although it started out as a hobby, Avery Land, student in horticulture and landscape design, has turned jewelry making into a profitable business.

The Inspiration

Even though she hasn't always been selling jewelry, Land has been designing since she was in elementary school. "My mother is an art teacher, so when I was little, she always found projects for me to do at home," Land says. "She started by having me make earrings, which were fun and easy. I would make them for my mother and my grandmothers, and even though they were horrible in the beginning, they always wore them!"

Land's mother, Nancy Land, says her daughter has always been creative. "We were constantly doing crafty things like painting and making beads. Avery just seemed to have an eye for design," Nancy Land says. "She really studies it, and she is always looking for ways to make her designs better."

As she got older, Avery Land says her interest and skills continued to grow. "In high school, I started taking art classes and bringing my pieces to shows. I would always do well at the shows, so I started selling

my jewelry to family and friends. I think this is where the idea for a business originated," she says.

Once Land got to college, her business called Willow Wind Designs took off. "I would be wearing one of my necklaces or bracelets around campus, and my friends or coworkers would ask me where I got it," Land says.

"When I told them that I made it, they would always tell me that I should make more pieces so they could buy some. My business exploded from there."

The Products

She designs necklaces, earrings and bracelets made from a variety of materials.

"I work with sterling silver, semi-precious stones, antique glass, a little bit of Swarovski crystal and anything else that I want to," Land says. "Although I do get some of my materials from antique shops and bead shows, I get a lot of my stuff from online stores. I also like to find bits and pieces on eBay®."

When it comes to designing the jewelry, Land says she gets inspiration and ideas from many different places.

"I get a lot of my inspiration from current trends," she says. "If it's not trendy, you don't sell it. I try to pay attention to styles and colors of things people wear in places like Hollywood. Even though that's a pretty big scale, it all trickles down. I also use my friends and magazines to get ideas. I frequently ask my roommates, 'Do you think this is cute? Would you wear this?'"

One of Land's customers, Peggy Roths, agribusiness student, says she likes the quality and variety of styles that Land's jewelry offers. "I know that when I buy something from Avery, I am getting

good quality stuff that will last for a long time," Roths says. "I also like how every piece that she makes looks different so you feel like you got something unique and special."

Besides designing and selling jewelry, Land also does jewelry repairs on a regular basis. "When people began finding out about my business, they started bringing me jewelry to fix too," Land says.

The Marketing

Once Land has designed a piece of jewelry, she then decides on its price. "The price of each piece really depends on what it is made of," Land says. "If you want sterling silver and lots of it, that's usually what makes things more expensive. You can also go with a cheaper metal for a lesser price."

Land says her earrings usually run from \$10 to \$15, her bracelets cost between \$20 and \$35 and her necklaces range from \$15 to \$150, depending on the types of materials used.

"I usually determine the price by taking into account how much the materials cost, how much time it took me to make it and what my competitors are charging for the same type of piece," Land says.

Although the majority of her sales come through word-of-mouth advertising, Land also sells her jewelry around Kansas.

"I am currently selling my jewelry in The Etc. Shop in Lawrence, and The Cutting Edge Hair Salon in Auburn," Land says. "I usually switch out the selection in each place every few months."

Land also custom makes jewelry for her customers.

"I have several people come to me with an idea of what they want, and then I do my best to make it for them," she says. "Some of these custom orders have included bridal jewelry and jewelry for bridesmaids."

While jewelry sales are seasonal, Land says that she usually makes an average of \$200 a month. Typically, the profit she makes each month depends on the amount of time she has to work on her designs.

The Future

As for the future of Willow Wind Designs, Land has plans for expansion.

"Many of my customers have been urging me to start hosting jewelry parties so they can invite their friends to see my designs," she says. "I also would like to start hosting Bracelet Bashes, which are parties for little girls. At each party, the girls would pay a flat fee and then be able to use whatever materials I had to create bracelets for themselves."

While some people may wonder how jewelry making connects to a horticulture and landscape design major, Land feels the two coincide pretty well.

"Whether you are designing landscapes or jewelry, you are really just thinking of balance, shape, texture and color," she says. "I think most things that have to do with design tie together."

No matter what career she pursues after graduation, Land says she will definitely continue to make jewelry.


"I think it's neat when you can turn a hobby you love into something profitable that other people are interested in," Land says. "But at the end of the day, I make jewelry because I love it." 

PHOTO BY KAITLYN CROW

