

Ear Expressions marks 25 years in Sisters

By Jim Cornelius
News Editor

Nikki Heiden was relaxing in her friend's backyard in Corvallis back in 1978, talking about work. She thought she needed to "do something" — as in something entrepreneurial — and her friend agreed. So they opened Ear Expressions in a local mall.

The jewelry and accessories business is still going strong all these years later — right here on Cascade Avenue in Sisters.

Heiden moved to Sisters in 1991 and brought her shop — and her relationships with artisans — with her. Through all the ups and downs of the retail climate in Sisters, she hung in there and built a business she could pass on to her daughter, Jennifer Heiden.

It's not easy keeping a retail business going for well over two decades. What's the secret?

"Just basically persistence," Nikki told *The Nugget* last week. "And be sure to work it yourself most of the time."

“ Just basically persistence. And be sure to work it yourself most of the time. — Nikki Heiden

Jennifer is now the one working it herself, and she'll mark Ear Expressions' 25th anniversary in Sisters on Saturday, November 26, with an open house after the Christmas parade, from 3 to 4 p.m. Her sister-in-law will be entertaining with harp music, and there will be chocolate.

Jennifer Heiden has been operating the business for the past two years, but her roots in the boutique go way deeper than that.

"I grew up in Corvallis and grew up in the shop," she recalled.

After a sojourn on the East Coast, she returned to Central Oregon.

"Actually, I came to visit and loved it here and wanted to stay," she said.

Nikki was ready to retire from her long retail career, and Jennifer was ready to take on the challenge of small-business ownership in Sisters.

"I love it," she told *The Nugget*. "I know it and I love it."

The long tenure on Cascade Avenue provides one of the sweet pleasures of the business. Jennifer meets families where people who first got their ears pierced at Ear Expressions are coming back in with their children for the same service.

And she also enjoys relationships with artisans, many of which date back to the 1980s.



PHOTO BY JIM CORNELIUS

Jennifer Heiden, right, marks 25 years in Sisters with Ear Expressions founder Nikki Heiden, left, and her daughter.

Ear Expressions specializes in earrings, and they carry a wide range, from popular national brands to Oregon-crafted items.

“ They really feel good about buying something local. — Jennifer Heiden

"I'm always looking for local lines to fill a niche that I don't have covered," Jennifer said.

Prices range from \$5 to about \$200, and there are

earrings that cater to people with sensitive ears.

Jennifer has noticed an increasing interest among her customers in purchasing locally made, hand-crafted items.

"They really feel good about buying something local," she said. "It's not just, 'Oh, I want to take home a souvenir.' They feel good about supporting a local individual. They feel good about supporting a small store, too."

While earrings are

the main attraction, Ear Expression also carries a variety of other accessories, and Jennifer is working on adding to those lines.

"I'm going to try to add more hair goods," she said.

Customers have been looking for hair clips, and Jennifer aims to provide what her customers want.

"I'm going to roll with what works," she said.

Ear Expressions is located at 221 W. Cascade Ave. For more information call 541-549-9572.

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