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Baroni Designs celebrates 15 years

Ann Johnson-Stromberg The Times-Standard
ARCATA -- For years, Baroni Designs has quietly grown its jewelry manufacturing business under the radar at the edge of town, but now in its 15th year of business the small company is beginning to show its teeth as a big business. The company has more than 1,200 retail locations stretching coast to coast and as far away as Japan. It is also holding a handful of hot accounts like Eddie Bauer, Red Envelope, Sundance Catalog, Pottery Barn Kids and Signals. Recently, Eddie Bauer agreed to sell Baroni jewelry exclusively and has become Baroni's biggest client.

Founder and co-owner Sarah Baroni said in a telephone interview from her vacation home in Cape Cod, Mass., that after she finished her master's degree in business administration she moved to Eureka.

Coming from a good job as a jewelry buyer for Cost Plus World Market in the Bay Area, she found herself at a loss for good job opportunities in the area. Instead of waiting for something good to come along, in 1991, she made her own opportunities and started making the jewelry she'd "always dabbled in personally."

Having great contacts from her previous job, she and her husband set to work hand-beading every item they sold. While most businesses start small and work big, she had thousands of items to create for her first client, Cost Plus and its 45 locations.

"As my sources and contacts grew, we grew," Baroni said, adding that soon their capabilities expanded to include silver jewelry.

A few years after getting started, Baroni's college roommate and Cost Plus co-worker Cathy Wilkos, became her partner. Baroni credits some of the success of the company to the partners symbiotic working relationship -- on separate coasts. Wilkos works in New York managing the marketing and sales aspects of the company while Baroni handles most of the day-to-day management of the company in Arcata. This way, Baroni said, neither partner steps on the others toes.

Both owners are passionate about the jewelry designs and are constantly e-mailing back and forth to each other and other staff members with a hand in Baroni creations. Baroni General Manager Todd Larsen said that so far the company is on

target for 15 percent growth this year. Larsen said he came on board after the company he worked for -- Yakima -- announced its closure.

Larsen said he has enjoyed the change of pace and the team he's now working on. One project near and dear to his heart is next week's launch of Baroni Designs' first men's jewelry line. Chunky leather bracelets, silver cuffs and rings he thinks will be a great addition for clients catering to the rugged look, like the Sundance Catalog.

While there is always a few fashion time-warp moments when thumbing through old catalogs, Baroni said that she is especially proud that much of the current and past jewelry lines are simple and timeless.

"I remember seeing my 90-year-old grandmother and 17-year-old sister wearing the same piece one day and it looked great on both of them," she said. "The look is simple enough and clean enough that it can really be interpreted by the women who wear it."

Baroni said the diversity of the designs also helps. With more than 1,000 SKU's, representing several hundred current designs at a time, the choices range from elegant pearls and whimsical sayings on silver charm necklaces and bracelets to leather and wood pieces combined with silver.

"Baroni Designs is experiencing tremendous growth and we credit much of our early success to being a part of the vibrant business community of Arcata," said Baroni. "We look forward to many more successful and happy years here."

Baroni jewelry can be found locally at Plaza Design locations, Abraxas in Ferndale and Caravan of Dreams in Arcata. For more information on Baroni Designs go to its website at <http://www.baronidesigns.com>.

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