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Pieces like these from Baroni Designs will be on sale Friday and Saturday at the company's annual sample sale, which will also feature discontinued lines. Tyson Ritter/The Eureka Reporter

Baroni Designs prepares for annual sale, launches breast cancer designs

by Courtney Hunt, 11/6/2007

Many Humboldt County jewelry aficionados marked off this Friday and Saturday on their calendar months ago. Those who don't yet have plans for the weekend, however, might want to head down to the Arcata Community Center, where Arcata jewelry company Baroni Designs will hold its annual sample sale.

Beginning at 3:30 p.m. on Nov. 9, an estimated 30,000 pieces of Baroni jewelry will be on sale for 30 to 75 percent off retail prices. The event spans two days — Friday from 3:30-8:30 p.m. and Saturday from 9 a.m.-4 p.m. — and attracts nearly 1,000 people each year.

Baroni Designs co-owner Sarah Baroni said she originally started the sale to promote the brand, but the event turned into an opportunity for the company to get to know its customers.

"We hardly sell anything locally — we do wholesale," Baroni said.

That's why it's "fun for us to be in the community, to get customer feedback and share their enthusiasm," she added.

When Baroni Designs started holding the sample sale 10 years ago, most of the jewelry sold was from discontinued lines. But every year, the selection of samples has grown and this year, the sale will include both one-of-a-kind and

custom pieces and lines that were recently featured in stores.

A variety of semiprecious stones and beads will also be for sale.

According to Baroni, though, one of the most-popular parts of the sale every year is the company's pearl line.

Baroni started the business 16 years ago after graduating from college and now owns it with longtime friend Cathy Witkos. While Baroni holds down the fort in Arcata, Witkos contributes to design and works on sales from Boston.

The cross-country business partnership has worked well for the duo, who have expanded the company from Arcata to 1,100 retailers across the nation.

Now, the company employs 29 people and sells more than 800 different jewelry styles.

Sterling silver is Baroni's metal of choice, and in recent years, she and Witkos have played with materials like resins, woods and shell to create unique but wearable and sophisticated jewelry.

Though the company's traditional customer has always been women, Baroni Designs is also catering to new demographic groups. The company recently debuted a line of jewelry geared toward children and a line for men.

So far, General Manager Todd Larsen said both have been "extremely popular."

"We're reaching out to a new customer," he said.

In an effort to find channels to reach these new customers, Baroni Designs has marketed its designs to department stores as well as boutiques, gift shops, galleries and catalogs that cater to women.

Another of Baroni Designs' more recent developments is its breast cancer awareness jewelry line. For the past two years, the company has been developing a line of jewelry to benefit women in Humboldt County, and in celebration of Breast Cancer Awareness Month last month, Baroni and Witkos released several new designs.

The company's breast cancer awareness line includes six pieces of jewelry, all of which are inscribed with inspirational messages and feature the color pink, and all of which are being sold at various retailers across the nation.

In addition to raising awareness for the disease, Baroni Designs is also donating 15 percent of all proceeds from the line to the Humboldt Community Breast Health Project.

"We picked a local organization because we wanted to support the local community, but we picked a cause that affects people worldwide," Baroni said.

She added that Baroni Designs employs a large number of women, many of whom have been directly affected by breast cancer.

"It's a cause that we all felt we strongly supported," she said.

Last year, Baroni Designs contributed \$1,350 to the HCBHP based on sales to date, and this year, more than \$4,000 has been raised for the organization.

Project Executive Director Dawn Elsbree is grateful for Baroni Designs' participation in the breast cancer campaign.

"For us, it's an amazing gift for a local business to actually take on fundraising for us and to help us get the word out about breast cancer and early detection," Elsbree said. "Partnerships with businesses like Baroni are just invaluable to us."

For more information about Baroni Designs' annual sale or its breast cancer awareness line, phone 707-822-8067 or go to www.baronidesigns.com.



Baroni Designs founder Sarah Baroni poses with General Manager Todd Larsen at the company's headquarters in Arcata. Baroni Designs will hold its 10th annual sample sale on Friday and Saturday. Tyson Ritter/The Eureka Reporter