

Rick and Annette Thurber opened Artisan's Jewelry & Gallery in White Salmon nine years ago. Casper is their furry greeter.



A Go-To Place for Originality

Owners of jewelry store focus on custom work, with a preference for local artists

By Jeanie Senior

Annette and Rick Thurber used to drive east on weekends, heading away from Portland to the Columbia River Gorge.

"We used to come up here every single Saturday and visit the stores," says Annette, a certified gemologist. Rick, a jeweler, has had a workshop in Portland for 22 years.

"Finally we said, let's just move up here," Annette says.

They bought land in Carson and in White Salmon, including a store building on the south side of East Jewett Boulevard

in White Salmon. They completely renovated and reopened the building nine years ago as Artisan's Jewelry & Gallery.

Artisan's is a full-service jewelry store, offering custom-designed jewelry, jewelry restoration and repairs. The shop also carries items created by some 180 artists from the United States and Canada.

"We really have a preference for local artists," Annette says, noting they always seek more artists to add to the mix.

The gallery's shelves and walls carry a bright assortment that includes photography, paintings, prints, blown glass, pottery, wood, beeswax candles, furniture, handbags and jewelry, from paper to platinum.

The Thurbers insist on original work.

"No outsourcing and it can't be made in China," Annette says. "Jewelry, pottery, you name it (the artists) make it."

Outsourcing doesn't give a local artist a chance to compete with mass production."

Artisan's selection, ranging from elegant to whimsical, has made the shop a go-to place for gifts.

Engagement and wedding rings account for a good share of Artisan's business. Besides the rings on display, customers also can work with Rick and Annette to design and create one-of-a-kind sets.

"We say Artisan's is your custom jeweler for all occasions," Annette says. "We've had a great following from people locally and from Hood River, Goldendale, Dufur, Mosier and The Dalles, as well as Stevenson and Carson—this whole region. The community's very supportive."

Rick, a master platinumsmith whose



Left, the displays in Artisan's Jewelry & Gallery include work from 180 artists.

Below, pieces of "Twilight" jewelry. From left are a ring and wristband with the Cullen crest; a pendant of the Volturi crest; and Bella's engagement ring and moonstone ring.

skills also include silversmithing and goldsmithing, has worked for four decades in what amounts to the Thurber family trade. His father, who trained him, was a jeweler in Minneapolis, two brothers are jewelers, and a nephew owns a jewelry store in Minneapolis.

Rick moved west in the mid-1970s. After a stint as an apprentice with Portland chef Horst Mager, he returned to jewelry. He loves to cook, but decided the career prospects were better for a jeweler.

Rick subsequently worked for several Portland jewelers, improving his skills at each place. At now-closed downtown jeweler Zell Bros., his coworkers—and teachers—were “old-time jewelers from Europe,” he says.

Rick employs two other jewelers at his Portland workshop in the Board of Trade building, where he does repairs and custom work for other Portland jewelry stores.

When the first movie in the “Twilight” saga, five movies based on author Stephanie Meyer’s vampire-themed fantasy novels, was being made in Portland about five years ago, Rick was commissioned to design jewelry for the films.

In the opening 10 to 15 minutes of

the first “Twilight” film, viewers will see most of the jewelry Rick created, although the actors wear the pieces in all of the movies. Pendants, rings and a wrist band are decorated with the crest of the Cullens—the vampire family that plays a leading role. The heroine, Bella, also wears Rick’s designs, including a moonstone ring and, later in the series, a wedding and engagement ring.

Cheap copies of the jewelry are available from a lot of vendors.

“Tons of knockoffs,” Rick says.

But the “Twilight” and “New Moon” pieces displayed in Artisan’s and on the shop’s website, www.artisansdesigns.com, are the real thing—replicas made by Rick from his original molds. That’s clearly appealing to fans who track down Artisan’s. The Thurbers say pieces of “Twilight” jewelry have gone to buyers all over the world.

Bella’s engagement ring, available in a range of prices—depending on whether it is done in sterling silver set with cubic



zirconiums or in gold or platinum set with diamonds—is popular.

Rick also designed a crest for the Volturis, another vampire coven featured in the series. The crest is displayed on a pendant with a dark red base stone of petrified dinosaur bone, set with a pearl, three diamonds and a garnet, and suspended from a handmade chain.

Artisan’s is open Wednesday through Saturday. Casper, the Thurbers’ Jack Russell terrier, divides her days between the shops in Portland and in White Salmon, where she “works” behind the counters, although she clearly would prefer to greet customers. ■