

Business

GET A BEAD ON THIS

Resident turns hobby into downtown jewelry business, showcase

By April A. Guilmet

When Carla Byrne attended high school in Lawrence, art and design classes weren't part of the landscape.

"I was very interested in art, and beading was a great creative outlet for me," Byrne said. "That's why I developed it in college."

After earning an education degree with a minor in art, Byrne pursued a career in teaching. She taught kindergarten and first grade at a private school in Tewksbury. For the past four years, she worked with third-graders at South Elementary School.

On Nov. 11, Byrne's jewelry and beading store, Bella Beads Boutique, opened its doors in Olde Andover Village, off Main Street. For Byrne, it was an ideal way to combine her two passions, teaching and the creative arts.

"I'd been doing this jewelry business on the side since 2003 – going to different craft shows and making jewelry out of my home as a hobby. This hobby of mine became a store," Byrne said.

One of the few stores of its kind in the Merrimack Valley, Bella Beads Boutique offers beads from around the world, as well as finished pieces, consignment items made by other jewelry designers and jewelry repair. Many of her unusual beads are found during regular visits to trade shows in New York City, she said.

She also plans to offer beading workshops for adults and teens this winter.

"I consider the workshops to be simply a different kind of teaching. But instead of books, I'll use beads," Byrne said.

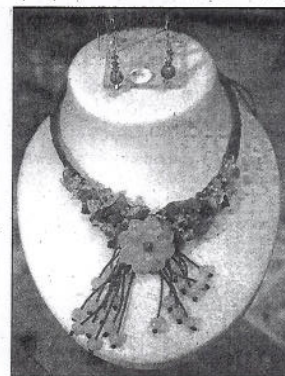
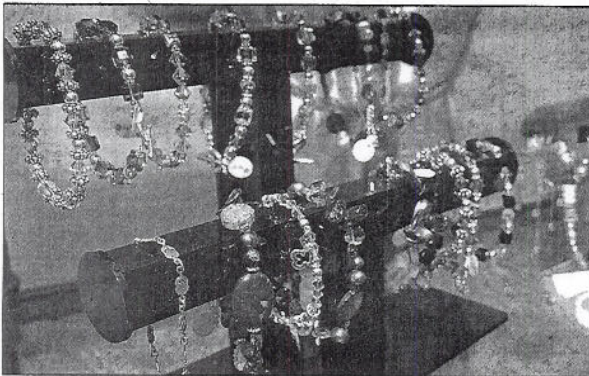
Unique to Bella Beads is its vintage redesign services, Byrne said.

"A lot of people come to me with beautiful old jewelry that belonged to a relative, but it's just not in style any more," she said. "I'll sketch out a new design for them and show them some new color schemes." Sometimes, she added, a necklace can be reconfigured into a bracelet and earrings, for example.

Byrne also offers customized jewelry for weddings and proms.

"Customers can bring in swatches and I'll make something up to match their dresses," she said.

Byrne also said she hasn't forgotten what its like to be a teenager lacking options for creative expression. That's one of the reasons she is offering the "Teen



PHOTOS BY TIM JEAN

Carla Byrne opened her new shop Bella Beads Boutique this past weekend. She plans to offer some space for one teen each month to show what he or she has designed.

Trunk Show," an opportunity for local teenage designers to display their wares in the boutique. She plans to choose one young designer each month.

"I thought it would be neat to give the kids their own space in my store," Byrne said. "It's a nice way to encourage young people to get going with their designing. It's not always about having book smarts."

A member of the Andona Society for the past six years, Byrne said fundraising and giving back to the community are important to her. Working for groups in Andover and other towns – such as A Better Chance and the Lawrence Public School system – she's donated many jewelry sets for local fundraisers as well as more than 25 percent of profits earned

through her home business.

"Lawrence is close to my heart. I grew up there. Plus giving back to the community is a big responsibility for business owners. It's very important," Byrne said.

Bella Beads Boutique, at 93 Main St. in Olde Andover Village, is open Monday through Friday from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. and on Saturdays from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.