

THE SUN, LOWELL, MASSACHUSETTS



Lowell native Carla Byrne opened her Andover bead shop, Bella Beads Boutique, last month at 73 Main St. The shop sells both finished and reworked vintage jewelry and beads. Byrne, a former schoolteacher in Tewksbury and Andover, also offers jewelry-repair services and plans to host beading workshops next year.

SUN PHOTOS:JOHN HILL

SHE JAZZES UP JEWELRY

Lowell native, former teacher reworks vintage pieces at new Andover store

By MARIE DONOVAN
Sun Correspondent

ANDOVER — Like many people, Carla Byrne inherited vintage jewelry from her late grandmother.

But while the treasures have gorgeous beads and strong sentimental value, sometimes vintage pieces look, well, a little too vintage.

"So many people have commented to me about having beautiful vintage beaded jewelry from older relatives, but don't wear it because the style is dated," Byrne said.

Several years ago, after learning how to bead jewelry as a hobby, the Lowell native began to experiment with reworking vintage pieces, combining their best features with updated trends to create new pieces.

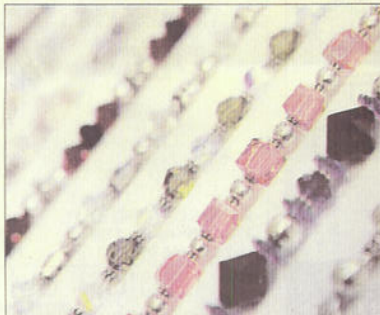
The hobby first turned into a home-based business. Then, last month, Byrne opened Bella Beads Boutique at 93 Main St. in Olde Andover Village.

Reworked vintage pieces are just one of Byrne's specialties. Bella Beads stocks other finished product creations and about 350 types of beads and findings, and as a result, it has become a haven for both jewelry lovers and amateur jewelers. Byrne also offers jewelry-repair services, and next year she plans to host beading workshops with visiting specialty designers.

Patty Garcia estimates that she has purchased about 10 pieces of jewelry from Byrne, including a custom-made, silver beaded ring.

"Her pieces are absolutely beautiful and she's a dream to work with. She's very fast and very professional as well," Garcia said.

A Paua shell necklace is among Garcia's favorite pieces: "It's very different;



After learning how to bead jewelry as a hobby several years ago, Lowell native Carla Byrne began to experiment with reworking vintage pieces.

The colors pick up from the clothing I'm wearing," she said.

Garcia's young daughter also loves Bella Beads' youth-oriented jewelry lines.

"The rock candy design is wonderful," Garcia said.

Bella Beads sells everything from Czech fire-polished and Austrian Swarovski crystal beads to others made from Bali sterling silver, vermeil, pewter, copper and all manner of semiprecious stones. Byrne, who now lives in Andover, makes and sells necklaces and earrings with changeable beads, so clients can mix them up to match their wardrobes. She can also combine sterling silver wire with things like sea glass that customers gather on beach vacations, to create one-of-a-kind pendants and earrings.

Byrne's personal favorite is an inspiration bracelet that has Swarovski crystals, sterling silver Bali beads and Aurora

Borealis Crystal beads emblazoned with words like "love," "peace" and "create." The bracelet retails for \$60 and can be purchased with matching earrings and a necklace. Mothers' bracelets, with their children's names and birthstone colors, are also very popular.

Previous to opening her store, Byrne operated Daisy Designs, a small home-based jewelry-design business. She also showed her creations at house parties and craft fairs across the state.

Byrne grew up in Lowell and Lawrence and graduated from Presentation of Mary Academy in Methuen, before going on to earn a bachelor's degree in early childhood education, with an art minor, from UMass Amherst. Until recently, she taught third grade in Andover public schools, and taught kindergarten and first grade for a decade previous to that, at the Burke Elementary School in Tewksbury.

"I like to consider this experience just a different form of teaching. Instead of being in the classroom with pencils and paper, I'm in a studio with beads and music," Byrne said.

For the past several years, the mother of two middle schoolers has put more than 25 percent of her business profits toward the purchase of silent auction or raffle items to benefit youth programs fund-raisers in the Merrimack Valley.

Bella Beads Boutique is open from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday to Friday and from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Saturday. Some merchandise is pictured at www.bellabeads.com. The store plans to offer a "Teen Trunk Show" of local youths' beaded creations. Teen designers can contact the store at (978) 204-8762 for more information.