



helle
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Photos by Lyle Cox

Taking on the Fashion World

From serving drinks to filling international orders for her jewelry, Beeson-Straw continues an extraordinary journey toward growing success.

by Kathy Oxborrow, for The Bulletin Special Projects

She was tending bar on the Oregon coast when patrons kept asking her about the jewelry she wore.

Between pouring drinks, Heather Nashelle Beeson-Straw would tell admirers that it was jewelry she had designed and made.

From those humble beginnings grew Nashelle, a successful and fast-growing Bend business that sells its locally made line of high-end fashion jewelry throughout the U.S. and internationally.

Beeson-Straw, in fact, just returned from the Mercedes

Benz Fashion Week in New York City, one of the biggest extravaganzas in the fashion world where all the spring trends in clothing, shoes, handbags and jewelry are shown. She had front row-seating at this celebrity attended, invitation-only event where she watched models prance down the runway wearing her new line of wood jewelry, Urban Forest.

A Journey's Beginnings

An Alaskan native, Beeson-Straw said she was obsessed with fashion from an early age. She didn't gravitate toward traditional education, but she did spend her days reviewing



fashion trends in the Juneau library.

"I would get every magazine and book in the library and just sit day after day studying," she said.

Beeson-Straw left school at age 16 and traveled around the country snowboarding and expressing her artistic talents via



singing and dancing. Returning to Juneau, she took her first formal art class — metal arts — at the University of Alaska, where she said she absolutely fell in love with the process.

"I lost track of anything that was bothering me," she said.





On December 2, from 2 to 9 pm, Nashelle will hold its third annual Peas and Love Trunk Show at 61511 American Lane, offering merchandise at reduced prices. The public is invited to bring canned goods that will be donated to a local charity.



"I didn't care what time it was; I was just lighting torches and soldering."

Leaving Juneau again, she started her stint as a bartender in Cannon Beach. Word spread about her designs, and women would come to the tavern for showings of her jewelry, which she kept under the bar.

Eventually, stores in Cannon Beach and Portland started selling her creations.

On her way to San Francisco for more training, she came through Bend on what she thought would just be a "pit stop." She ended

up falling in love with Bend and her next-door neighbor, to whom she is now married and with whom she has three young boys.

After moving to Bend, a friend who had a clothing store next to the Pine Tavern offered her space for a downtown gallery. That lasted for two years, and Beeson-Straw said things were going great. She was about to give birth to her first child when the building owner decided to sell, leaving her with no place to display her jewelry.

"I got really scared because I thought I had a lifestyle for myself and my baby, and all of a sudden I didn't," she said.

Heeding the advice of a colleague, Beeson-Straw decided to try to market her jewelry at a Los Angeles trade show. But she only had one day to produce a line and mail it off for a juried review in New York City.

"I went home, and my husband and I made a collection through the night," she said.

Once accepted, she had a week to prepare for the trade show. She didn't have any marketing collateral, only a "makeshift business card" when she toted her three-month-old son and her jewelry to LA.

With her jewelry displayed on a cloth-covered card table while her son sat beneath, she wrote orders worth \$43,000. The most she had ever sold in a month until then was \$1,000.

She arrived back in Bend with a stack of orders and "just started crying," overwhelmed with all the work that lay ahead.

She and her husband managed to literally "bang out all the orders" in her living room. At the time, Beeson-Straw said she didn't know what QuickBooks was and hand-wrote all her invoices, adding little notes with hearts drawn on them thanking the buyers.

Today's Success

The days of making jewelry in her living room are long gone. She knows about QuickBooks now and employs 32 people, including two designers, a marketing team and a recently hired chief executive officer, who all work in a warehouse in southeast Bend. The





site includes a retail showroom.

A New York public relations firm promotes her business, seven showrooms around the world display her designs and her reps write multi-million dollar orders.

But some things haven't changed. Nashelle Jewelry is still handmade right here in Bend.

There have been growing pains, and at the end of 2009, overwhelmed with the rapid growth of Nashelle and dealing

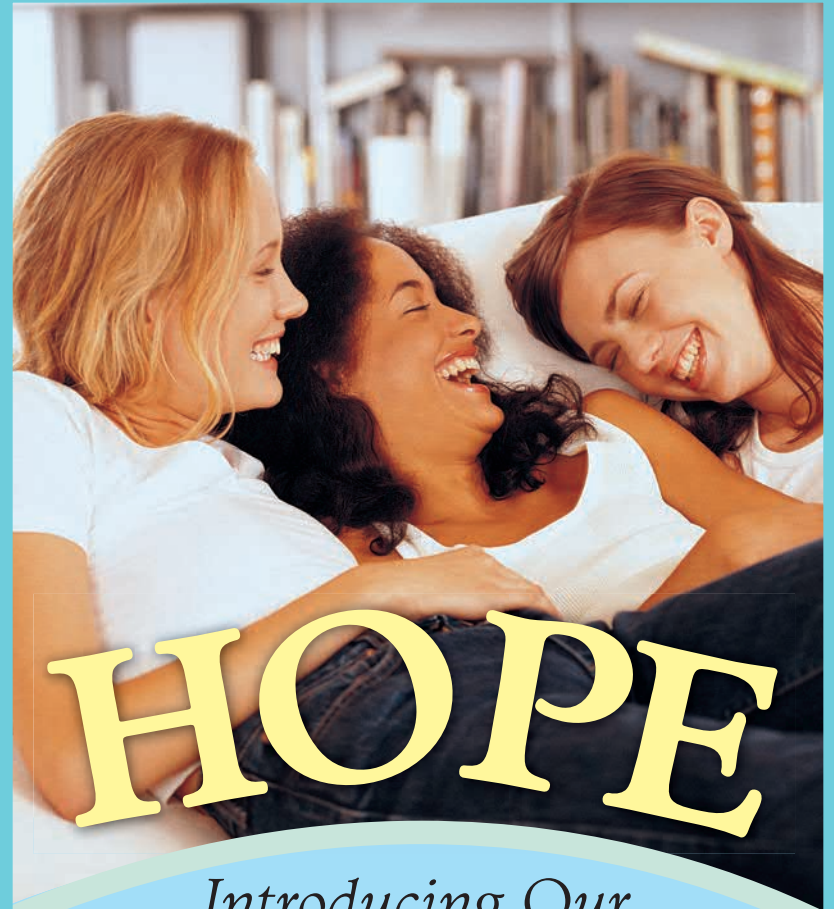
with major surgery for her third son soon after birth, she considered selling the business.

But that's all in the past.

When asked what lay ahead for Nashelle, her response indicates no lingering will to quit

"I want to take on the world," she said.

With the launching of the new wood jewelry, she plans to expand that collection, plus start designing and marketing handbags, shoes and dresses.



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