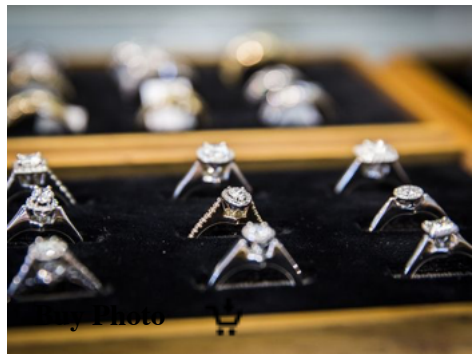


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Downtown Muncie jewelers stay busy, look to expand

Mary Freda Published 6:00 a.m. ET July 13, 2018



(Photo: Jordan Kartholl / Star Press)

MUNCIE, Ind. — On a typical afternoon at Murray’s Jewelers, you’ll find Julie Herron or Judi Lee cleaning the cases with a slow, detailed cadence. The song changes over the speakers every so often, but the indie tunes are drowned out by the chatter of customers in the showroom.

For the last 133 years, not much at Murray’s has changed. They’ve moved buildings a few times, but overall, it’s always been a few Murrays creating, repairing and selling jewelry. Over the last few years, however, the store keeps racking up clientele, getting busier and busier.

Ding, dong

A newlywed couple comes in to get their rings sized and soldered. James Murray chats with the couple, explains which size is the best to go down to and promises the rings will be back in a couple of days.

The same thing is requested by a newly-engaged couple, except they’re leaving for Europe in five days and would like the ring before then. Without missing a beat, James says no problem — it will be done tomorrow.

Ding, dong

The last customers from the rush leave. It’s just after 1 p.m. The sweep of the door sucks the chatter out of the room. The indie music returns to the speakers and James, well, he’s tired.

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Murray’s Jewelers showcases their Tulip Collection. (Photo: Jordan Kartholl / Star Press)

“Over the last 10 years, we’ve been getting busier and busier. Someone will close and we’ll absorb at least a part of their clientele. Probably not all of it; you know those other jewelry stores are going to absorb a little bit, too,” he said. “So, that kept happening over the last decade and then [Joe \(Ashcraft\) closed \(/story/news/local/2017/04/24/ashcraft-43-years-making-memories-customers/100595210/\)](#) and it was like — bam, that’s all she wrote. A lot of mornings out in the showroom feel like a typical Christmas Day.”

It’s not that the Murrays don’t like being busy; they’ve just become one of the only independent jewelers in the city because since 2009 a series of stores — including Ashcraft Jewelers, [Jeffrey E. Carter Jewelers \(/story/news/local/2014/11/17/jewelery-muncie-closing-jeffrey-carter/19201847/\)](#) and Standt’s Fine Jewelry —has closed.

The influx of customers has led to a pile of orders in the Murray’s workshop, which pushed the family to hire a new bench jeweler.

With an expanding staff, Murray’s is going through growing pains. In January 2019, the store will expand into what is currently Rep. Luke Messer’s office next door along Charles Street, which will create more office space and would potentially allow the store to expand its workshop and showroom, James said.

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Murray’s Jewelers in downtown Muncie. (Photo: Jordan Kartholl / Star Press)

“We’re just getting so busy,” he said. “We’re just outgrowing the space that we have. I mean it’s tough to jump through one or two of these doorways without having someone coming the opposite direction.”

Although Muncie still has retail chain jewelers, they don’t offer what Murray’s does: in-house repairs and custom, handmade jewelry. While the Murrays do sell some manufactured pieces, most of their jewelry comes straight from the workshop to the floor.

Murray’s hasn’t always specialized in custom jewelry, however.

The store began with watchmaker James Murray in 1885. The first Murray’s Jewelers doubled as a pocket watch and harness shop. Later it became a watch shop, then transitioned into custom jewelry when Todd and his brother, Steve Murray, took ownership of the store.

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Todd Murray uses a blowtorch in preparation for a ring mold at Murray's Jewelers in Muncie. (Photo: Jordan Kartholl / Star Press)

Now, Todd’s sons James and Ryan Murray — the fifth generation of Murrays — continue the business model their dad and uncle started decades ago by creating custom pieces of jewelry.

Among the custom creations is the Tulip Collection, which the Murrays patented two years ago (</story/money/business/2016/11/19/murrays-jewelers-receives-patent-ring-design/94032024/>). Now, they are working on getting the collection to retail jewelry stores within the next year or two, James said. Once that happens, the collection still will be sold at Murray’s but will be manufactured at a higher volume.

“Basically, what we’re going to do is make sure that the collection is so identical to what we have in our case, that the thought is eventually we might start ordering from that company too,” James said

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Typically, each ring from the collection takes four to six weeks to make, unless it’s an “exceptionally complicated” piece, he said. Cutting down on time spent on the collection would allow the Murrays to work on other pieces.

Ding, dong.

Nancy walks in with a gold bracelet that needs to be repaired. It’s Thursday and the day is four hours short of being over.

She doesn’t want to lose the integrity or fit of the piece. Before making a final decision, James details three options that should repair the clasp so she can wear it once more.

As she waits for her claim ticket, James explains the wait time and apologizes: she smiles and says it’s no problem.

She’s the last customer in the showroom until the next wave comes in.



Customers check out Murray's Jewelers Tulip Collection at their downtown store in Muncie. *(Photo: Jordan Kartholl / Star Press)*

The speakers still play soft music. But this time, James and Ryan are in the back, diligently working on each order in hopes of finishing a piece before another gets dropped off.

When closing time rolls around the doors are locked, but Ryan continues his work in the repair shop while James sets a few orders aside to repair at his bench in the basement.

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