

Garage converted to booming jewelry business



Husband and wife jewelry team Frank and Kim Yanke went into business themselves, converting their garage into a studio.

By Mary Rodrigue
special writer

It's a safe bet that Kim and Frank Yanke's garage is the only one in Farmington with gold, diamonds, emeralds and rubies parked inside.

Their car stays in the driveway along with a watchdog.

The jeweler husband and wife team converted their attached garage into a studio almost three years ago when they decided to go into business themselves. And as Kim Yanke puts it, "business is snowballing."

"We've been working night and day the past five weeks getting orders ready for Christmas," she said, soldering a setting into a ring mount while talking to a visitor.

"We're almost this busy in the summer, too."

THE MAJORITY of their customers are drawn from the 40 art shows Frank Yanke participates in annually. They include the Charlotte, St. Joseph and Birmingham fairs which the Yankes classify as buying, not browsing, fairs.

Besides their own clientele, they do trade work for other jewelers. They count a pair of cufflinks for Lee Iacocca and a brooch for Michigan First Lady Paula Blanchard among their commissioned work.

"It's just a matter of time before we have those (type) people for customers ourselves," Frank said.

The Yanke's report sales have risen from the \$200 to \$1,500 range over the past three years.

Inventory display cases hold custom-designed gold rings, chunky but attractive with colored gem or diamond settings. Earrings go from simple to dangling, necklaces from simple beaded to intricate gold-carved windsurfers, pine cones — even a spinning wheel suspended on a gold chain. One prevalent characteristic of their work is that they don't skimp on gold. Each piece has a well-crafted appearance.

"WE USE ALL new gold in our castings," Kim said. "Every time you melt gold, it breaks down the alloy."

"We just make sure the piece is always right," Frank said. "We take personal pride in each piece. We like people to talk highly of our work."

Previous experience (she has 14 years, he nine working for other jewelers) has helped them shape their own style.

"Our rings are a bit heavier than most," Frank said. "We did so much trade work where the bands were so thin that the shanks were easily bent."

"Our rings are balanced. They fit well. We've had comments from customers telling us how comfortable they feel."

Although much of their work is sold mail order, customers coming into the studio get a free lesson in jewelry making.

"I've had customers spend an hour, an hour and a half in here," Frank said. "We educate people as to what fine jewelry is. There's no reason everyone can't have it. The price is right."

Their inventory starts with ear cuffs at \$25. They have \$600 rubies and almost identical-looking red spinels for \$150. An untrained observer also would be unlikely to distinguish an expensive emerald from a tourmaline worth a fraction of the cost.

THE STUDIO with its casting, polishing, and steam machines and torches has the look of a busy production center, but not the feel of an assembly line operation. Each piece is the product of hours of work.

"I'm the laborer, Frank is the businessman," Kim said. "That's the way we like it."

Currently they operate on a six-day-a-week schedule.

"Frank sometimes works seven days with the art fairs which are usually on weekends. He's a workaholic," Kim said.

They are still waiting to become part of the celebrated Ann Arbor street fair.

Kim is number 139 and Frank number 134 respectively on the waiting list.

"Hopefully, next year we'll get in," Kim said.

The couple like art fairs for the casualness and one-on-one rapport they allow with customers.

"In custom designing, you get to know exactly what a person wants," Frank said.

"I used to work for a jeweler in Grosse Pointe," Kim said. "All the men in the store wore three-piece suits. A situation like that can make a customer feel like 'I can't afford it' so they don't bother to come in."

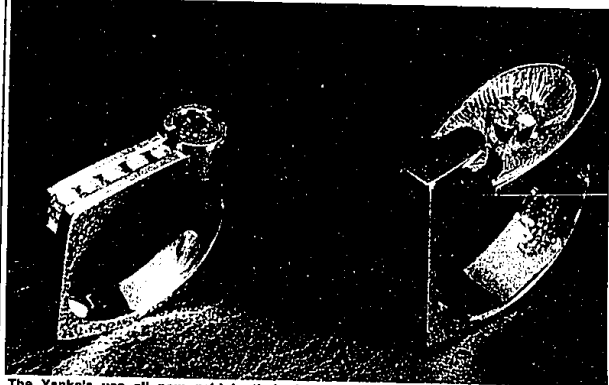
The couple met while both worked for Alexander Bongiorno Jewelers in Troy. Kim started with Bongiorno out of high school in 1972 and Frank was hired a few years later.

"I got training from one of the finest craftsmen there is," Kim said. "We keep that craftsmanship and quality in our work, but the style is our own. It's a style which people come to identify."

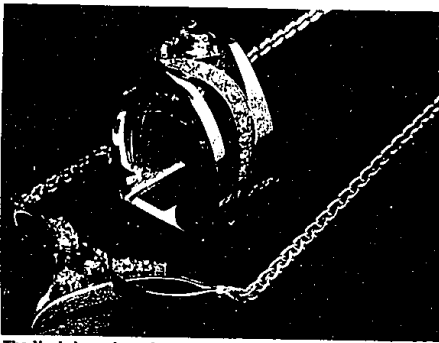
Both made career moves to other jewelry stores. Frank's dissatisfaction with his last employer and the fact that both husband and wife spent several hours moonlighting on their own side jobs led the couple to create Yanke Designs.

Kim continued to work for a commercial jeweler while Frank established their homebased operation in 1982.

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The Yanke's use all new gold in their jewelry.



The Yanke's prefer using a much heavier look in their styling of jewelry.

memory lane

MEMORIES, MEMORIES... have we got the memories. And we'd like to share them with you. Using local newspaper files, we're dishing out generous slices of life in the Farmington community from 40, 30, 20 and 10 years ago.

DEC. 28, 1945 —

FARMINGTON'S FIRE DEPARTMENT joined area firefighters in battling a blaze which destroyed the Jake Taylor Chevrolet garage in Walled Lake on Dec. 27. Officials said that the fire began when gasoline fumes were somehow ignited. Eight automobiles parked in the garage also were destroyed. For a time, the entire Walled Lake business district was threatened, officials said.

NEW OFFICERS OF THE Farmington Masonic Lodge were picked Dec. 25. They were Uno Danielson, worshipful master; Herb Bondy, senior warden; Charles Lussenden, junior warden; Charles Elkin, senior deacon; Robert Hubert, junior deacon; Eddie Alexander, secretary; Arthur Lamb, treasurer; Al Ross, chaplain; Ralph Auten, tyler; Amos Otis, marshal; Les Eger, senior steward; and Fred Coolie, junior steward.

SHORT ITEM: "A daughter was born to Mr. and Mrs. James Warner Thursday, Dec. 21."

"THIS LITTLE FELLOW is Mr. 1945," said an item in the Around the Block column, which featured a drawing of the traditional New Year's baby, "and he's off to a pretty jaunty start. Let's hope all the things he carries in his little bag will be good — we could stand a few pleasant surprises, I'm sure. Anyway, here's wishing you a very, very Happy New Year."

CLASSIFIED AD: "LOST — Will person who found change purse, lost last Thursday, containing sum of money saved to pay taxes and insurance, please return it. Needed desperately. Mrs. Howard Westphal, 34235 Grand River."

SHORT ITEM: "Deodorants should be applied 15 minutes before an outer garment is donned to prevent weakening of dress fibers."

DEC. 30, 1954 —

WINNERS OF THE Christmas Home Lighting, sponsored by the Farmington Junior Chamber of Commerce, were Fred Menke, Harry Pritchard and Edward Schmid. Engraved plaques were presented to the winners.

CLASSIFIED AD: "GOOD ROTTED horse manure, 4 yards, \$10 delivered. Farm. 0534-W2, 25811 Power." Another classified: "1951 Hudson 4-door Super Six, good shape, radio and heater, cheap. Will take trade. Farm. 2085."

THE FARMINGTON TOWNSHIP Police Department owned two police cars after the 1955 Ford it

purchased was delivered by the Berling-McHugh Ford Agency in Farmington.

KLENZO MOUTHWASH was advertised at 79 cents a pint by Smith Rexall Drugs, 27702 Eight Mile at Grand River. Also advertised: Kani-Leek hot water bottle, 2-quart capacity, for \$3.25.

SHORT ITEM: "Daria Mae, Arnold and Cynthia, children of Mr. and Mrs. Louis Jennings of Norfolk Avenue, were all on the sick list last week."

TOM LEACH, CAPTAIN of the Red League Sharpshooters, scored four points to lead his team past the Blue Angels, 11-8, in a Farmington Intramural basketball game played Dec. 16 at Farmington High School.

Dec. 30, 1964 —

"FRIENDS OF THE Harvey Lau family on New-castle had a touch of the vapors this year when receiving Lau Christmas cards," noted an item in the Farmington Socially Speaking column written by Jerry Wendt. "Bodily lettered underneath the traditional Harvey Lau Family signature were the words ME, TOO, BONNIE. Close investigation brought forth the fact that there is indeed a new addition to the family named Bonnie, a cute 'Shelley' doggie. So fond is the family of Bonnie, they included her in the family greeting card."

LUNCH IN THE FARMINGTON Elementary Schools on Jan. 5 was to include meat-cheese balls in barbecue sauce, green beans, hot roll and butter, vanilla pudding, sliced peaches and milk.

JOHN P. MCBETH, who lived on Kendallwood in Farmington Township, was appointed maintenance and technical director for Detroit Edison's three industrial power plants in Wyandotte.

ART WOELHLER WON the 108-pound title, and Dick Johnston was the champion at 151 pounds as Farmington High's wrestling team competed in the South Oakland County Tournament.

DEC. 30, 1974 —

FARMINGTON AND NORTH Farmington lost first-round games in the Northwest Holiday Basketball Tournament. North lost to Walled Lake Central, 59-61. Kevin Gastor led the losers with 14 points. Farmington got 14 points from Randy Meler in a 55-48 loss to Livonia Bentley.

SHIRLEY MORRISON, a Farmington Hills resident, was elected Michigan State Coordinator of the National Organization of Women (NOW), a women's rights group. "We're not going away," she said in an interview. "We're getting bigger."

GIRL SCOUT TROOP 345 members — including Christy Parker, Michelle Stevenson and Linda Goldberg — decorated the Christmas tree which stood in the lobby of the Farmington Hills city hall.

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