

Retailers from page 5C

of the 25-year-old Independent Jewelers Organization based in Westport, Conn., which is experiencing record membership. Independent offer first-name service, support local organizations, carry merchandise especially targeted to their customers (rather than the mass market), and create most of the area's jobs.

Yet, Roberts pointed out, fierce competition from volume retailers

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all jewelry. Now they sell only 30 to 35 percent. Other industries are doing worse.

But it doesn't have to be this way, according to Roberts, and ironically, retailers are beginning to see a return to Main Street shopping.

"In addition to nostalgia, there are real benefits when hometown shopping are taking market share in huge gulps. In the 1950s, hometown jewelers sold 90 percent of

Jo Melvin said customers shop in their store because of the staff's product knowledge and their dedicated customer service. She said the family-run business can operate along with the home superstores because they, too, can offer low prices, thanks to increased buying power through association with other hardware dealers.

"Our organization, based in Ft. Wayne, Ind., is owner-owned," she said. "We're seeing our membership and number of warehouses grow by leaps and bounds. We enjoy industry-related information programs, electronic ordering systems, and increased buying power."

Pharmacist Jerry Mills said the annual seminars and legislative voice that professional associations provide their members is also very important to doing business in today's complicated society.

"When General Motors changed their insurance company a couple of years back, I called my pharmacist's association in Virginia and they wrote a supportive letter to my legislator. When you have to go up against an issue, it's reassuring to have someone on your side."

Trade association fees are low — \$100-\$300 a year in most cases. But members agree the returns — enough information and buying clout to challenge the big guys — is worth it.

All's Well That Ends Well



Sweetendings: Award-winning pastry artist Ron Fetch poses among his holiday creations in his new shop at 4113 Orchard Lake in West Bloomfield. The company move from Royal Oak took place in November with Fetch deciding to open a satellite Sweetendings shop at 4505 N. Woodward, two blocks south of 14 Mile. Fetch and his staff specialize in unique tortes, individual French pastries, chocolates and wedding cakes. For more information call (810) 539-2111.

Retail Realities: Yes, chocolatier does exist

Fine chocolate buyers want the skinny on Joseph Schmidt, so here it is!

Yes, there is a real person behind the product name. He is of Austrian descent and known for his artistry with chocolate. Joseph Schmidt Confections was established in San Francisco in 1983. He originated the egg-shaped truffle which has been widely copied.

Schmidt prefers to use Belgian chocolate in his products because of the method used to process cocoa beans — no alkali is used, so there is no burning sensation in the throat when the chocolate is swallowed.

The more quickly the chocolate melts on the tongue, the higher

the cocoa butter content in the chocolate. Europeans prefer to make hollow rather than solid chocolate novelties because they are considered more delicate to eat. Solids are considered "crude."

White chocolate cannot legally be called "chocolate" because it contains no solids from the cocoa bean — only cocoa butter.

Audrey Ryan is the creative genius behind the chocolatier's award-winning packages. Together the pair watch upscale retailing after upscale retailing add the product line to its shelves. Locally Joseph Schmidt chocolates are available at Jacobson's, Neiman Marcus, Saks Fifth Ave. and Hudson's.

Basics from page 5C

Three thousand units a month are born in their New York City manufacturing plant.

"We sort of bounced ideas off people in the industry. Michael Gould, Bloomingdale's chairman liked the idea so much he prepaid half the orders so we'd be able to produce them. The last time he did that was for Ralph Lauren," boasted Kozlov Gardner.

Letting your personal style shine through is what the kit is all about. Team Belly Basics four pieces with blazers, denim shirts, anything in your wardrobe then accessorize with a scarf or pin.

The women each invested \$25,000 to start the business. However, their strategy for growth is a step at a time. Last spring, they introduced the kit in short sleeves, plus an additional Two Tops in a Box. For the fall, Belly Basics is offering a soft and sensual velvet dress perfect for celebrating the holidays. The dress comes in black, hunter and wine with black hosiery.

Letting your personal style shine through is what the kit is all about. Team Belly Basics four pieces with blazers, denim shirts, anything in your wardrobe then accessorize with a scarf or pin.

"Or mix the pieces with your husband's clothes, or an oversized shirt," Kozlov Gardner said. "Each cotton lycra piece has room to grow. Unlike other maternity clothes, the waistband is 4-inches wide for comfort while the baby grows. The kit sells in pre-pregnancy sizes. If you wear a 6, you'd buy a small. It'll carry you through the entire pregnancy."

The Pregnancy Survival Kit is available at Kiddilywinks on Maple in Birmingham, OZ in Meadowbrook Village Mall in Rochester Hills, Rex & Sherm in the Bloomfield Plaza.

It's also available from Hudson's Lakeside in Sterling Heights, Twelve Oaks in Novi, and Oakland Mall in Troy.

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