



LAURA TORRES/CITIZEN CORRESPONDENT (4)

Master jeweler Keith Rifenburg, who began working with Certified Jewelers owner Rick Grimes in 1989, works on a piece at the Immokalee Road location.

THE 'GOLD' STANDARD

CERTIFIED JEWELERS BOOMS WITH BLING, OPERATING TWO NAPLES LOCATIONS

By John Osborne
Citizen Correspondent

Rick Grimes, owner of Certified Jewelers, has learned a lot of valuable lessons in his life.

Most were learned from his dad, Henry, who began teaching Grimes the jewelry business in a Rhode Island manufacturing plant before Grimes was even old enough to shave.

"My relationship with my father couldn't have been better," said Grimes, 63, who started working with his father at the tender age of 12. "He was a great man and a great dad, and he really taught me a lot."

Grimes' education continued in 1981, when he and his father opened Henricks Jewelers on Bonita Beach Road.

What started off as an 800-square-foot store eventually grew into a 12,000-square-foot behemoth, one that had some of the biggest names in jewelry coming down to Southwest Florida to see how the pair did business.

"Zales, Jared, Sterling — none of them could believe we were doing the business we were doing," he said. "We were doing \$17 million to \$20 million in volume with an average ticket price of \$600, and that was back when Bonita Springs had 17,000 residents. We were selling 33,000 pieces a year, and they just couldn't believe it. They basically said I was lying, but I'd say, 'Why would I pay taxes on it if it wasn't true?'"

Still, Grimes didn't learn his most expensive lesson until 2003, 13 years after Henry's passing, when he sold Henricks to a trio of high-powered investors who bankrupted the thriving business in four short years.

"I handed them an operation that was running like a fine Swiss clock and they ran it right out of business," said Grimes, who estimates he lost \$11 million on the doomed transaction.

Even after taking such a significant financial hit, however, Grimes couldn't find it in himself to just give up. Instead, he simply started all over — this time in another 800-square-foot store on Immokalee Road in North Naples.

"I started Certified Jewelers seven years ago in what I consider to be the worst market since the Great Depression, and our customers flocked back," he said. "Since then, we've expanded three times, to 3,400 square feet, and we've also opened another 3,400-square-foot store on Naples Boulevard."

Not that the comeback road was easy. Even with the Henricks name gone — another casualty of the ill-fated sale — Grimes said customers recognized the branding silhouette of a jeweler that's based on a photograph of his father.

"After losing Henricks, basically having it stolen from me, we're almost back now," he said. "We're up every year over seven years, and even when everybody else was laying off we were hiring."

The first employees Grimes hired at Certified Jewelers were those he refers to as "The Magnificent Seven," a core



Diamond rings sparkle inside the Certified Jewelers location on Immokalee Road in Naples.

Left to right, the "Magnificent 7" of Certified Jewelers: administrative assistant Ann Bohley, owner Rick Grimes, master jeweler Keith Rifenburg, president John Gast, sales associate/gemologist Jan Grube, manager Hank Beckman and sales associate Randy Connell pose inside the Immokalee Road location.



The Certified Jewelers sign at the Immokalee Road location. The business has expanded three times since opening in 2007, and now includes a second location at 6345 Naples Boulevard.

group who worked with him and his dad at Henricks.

John Gast, president of Certified Jewelers, has been with Grimes since the beginning of the Henricks days. Head jeweler Keith Rifenburg and saleswoman Jan Grube have worked with him since 1989. And Grimes' current secretary, Ann Bohley, is the daughter of his original secretary at Henricks.

"I don't even like the word 'employees,'" Grimes said. "I don't treat them like employees because we're all friends. When we first started back, I'd pay them before I'd pay myself a penny."

Gast said it's exactly that sort of long-term bond that extends to Certified Jewelers' connection with its customers.

"After 30 years in business you build a lot of relationships," he said. "You wouldn't believe how many people stop in just to say, 'Hey, John, I'm back in town.'"

Many times they buy jewelry, too, but Gast believes selling it makes for an extremely rewarding career.

"We sit here all day selling love," he said. "Somebody came in here because they're happy. I've seen little kids who came in holding their parents' hands years ago who are coming in now to buy an engagement ring."

Rifenburg and Grube also said they cherish their jobs at Certified Jewelers.

"It's a real close-knit group of people in both stores," said Rifenburg, who learned the jewelry trade in Paris. "Everyone gets along and there's no infighting or politics at all."

Grube echoed those sentiments.

"I'm very happy here because it's such a good atmosphere," she said. "The most important thing to me is customer satisfaction, and if you ask me, people have to trust their jeweler like they trust their doctor."

Calling himself "the head coach of a really good team," Grimes said the plan from here is to keep doing what he's been doing for so many years — a lesson learned from his father.

"Our goal is to always make the best possible product and sell it at the lowest possible price," he said.

For more information, visit www.certifiedjewelernaples.com.