



Sally Roesler began selling beads from a table at Chilmark flea market in 1989. She opened Beadniks in 1990. *Ivy Ashe*

## **Beadniks For Sale, But the Bead Goes On from Virginia Beach**

*Ivy Ashe* Thursday, August 21, 2014 - 5:22pm

Tucked away on Church street in Vineyard Haven is a small one-room building bursting with creativity. Inside, it smells of incense, and ceiling fans spin overhead without making a sound. People browse the wares, armed with bamboo trays and small plastic baggies. They choose carefully and then sit down to craft. Necklaces, bracelets, earrings, headbands, any accessory goes, but they all start with the same tiny foundation: beads.

Welcome to Beadniks.

The store has been a staple of Church street for 24 years, and it is now for sale. Owner Sally Roesler, 58, is stepping back from the retail side of beads to focus on her wholesale business, The Bead Goes On. It's a lightening of the load, she told the Gazette. The Bead Goes On is based in Virginia Beach, Va., where Ms. Roesler has lived since 2008. Maintaining the two endeavors



Tens of thousands of beads available at Beadniks. —

at the same time is too much of a challenge.

Beadniks has long been an endeavor that appears to defy logic — a business based on beads is an idea at once simple, brilliant and slightly crazy. The best ideas usually are.

Over the past 24 years the store has seen both success and stability, establishing itself as a go-to place for both Islanders and visitors. At one point it had national reach: there were eight franchises across the country, all using the template Ms.

Roesler established on the Vineyard. Not all of the franchises survived the recession, but the flagship store did.

“I’ve been very satisfied by the concept and the metamorphosis of it,” Ms. Roesler said.

It all started with a trip to Asia.

In 1988, Ms. Roesler went abroad for a year and a half, and brought back souvenirs — including beads — that were extremely popular with friends and family. She went back to Asia the next year for four months, attending a gemology school in Bangkok. On her return to the state, she and her then-husband came to the Vineyard to visit a friend and, as with so many before them, just stayed. Ms. Roesler launched her wholesale catalog then, populated with items she’d brought back from her travels. In the summer of 1989 she set up a table at the Chilmark Flea Market. She also began to sell glass beads at a co-op art gallery on Church street. The beads sold out. Ms. Roesler returned to Asia and brought back more beads. Those sold out, too.

“It was a light bulb moment,” Ms. Roesler said. “Oh, beads are selling.”

She thought about opening a beads-only kiosk in Oak Bluffs, and suggested it to a friend, Brian Robertshaw, who was also buying from her. He took it one step further: open a bead shop.

“He chipped in five thousand dollars, and I chipped in five thousand dollars of inventory,” Ms. Roesler said. Beadniks opened for business in a 200-square-foot room on the first floor of the house on Church street. It was 1990.

They were too cheap to buy a commercial phone, Ms. Roesler said, so instead they called the phone company and asked to be listed as last name Nicks, first name Bead.

Initially the store just sold the beads themselves, but a turning point came shortly after wampum artist Kate Taylor came in looking for headpins, which are used to make earrings. Ms. Roesler told her the headpins would be in next week.

“I didn’t know what it was,” Ms. Roesler admitted.



An on-site craft table has been crucial to Beadniks' success. —

After that, she and Mr. Robertshaw began to stock the supplies needed to create jewelry. Headpins, clasps, fasteners, hooks and wire all became staples. Beadniks was now a full-service bead store, complete with a tall work table in the back where people could make necklaces on-site.

Mr. Robertshaw left the Island in 1992 to open his own bead store in Brattleboro, Vt. That store, like Beadniks, is still going strong today.

In 2000 another turning point was reached. A rainy, dreary summer meant that plenty of people were searching for indoor activities. More than once, crowds packed onto the small front porch as people waited to go inside. There simply wasn't enough space inside the old Beadniks store to accommodate demand.

Conveniently, the building next door, formerly the home of Ray's Tires, had just become available after the owner retired. The next summer, Beadniks opened in its new location, where it has been ever since. The old house was used as "corporate headquarters," in Ms. Roesler's words, where bookkeeping and inventory work took place, and the wholesale business moved into a small shed on the property where tires were once stored.

The bead world "waxes and wanes," Ms. Roesler said, and a peak was reached from 2003 to 2006. It was during this time that Beadniks became a franchise. That was another light-bulb moment, Ms. Roesler said, driven by the sheer number of people in the store who said they "wished there were one of these near me." She researched franchising, wrote a manual and found a buyer. The first Beadniks franchise opened in Sarasota, Fla., in 2005.



Shopping and traveling element of finding beads has been the best part of the job, Ms. Roesler said. —

For a time, beginning in 2008, the Vineyard store was its own franchise, under different ownership but still following the Roesler template. Ms. Roesler came back on board last year.

Most of the franchises that followed were located in vacation destinations like the Vineyard, including Naples, Fla., Santa Monica, Calif., and Denver, Colo.

"Beads take time and money, and when you're on vacation you have both of those," Ms. Roesler said.

But crucial to Beadniks' success was the on-site craft table. As with any accessory or fashion, jewelry allows for individual expression. Beadniks offered something more: a chance to be completely hands-on with the process, and to see a vision through from start to finish, even if it was just a child making a bracelet from rubber spiky beads (which remain a top seller).

And the Vineyard store offered an extraordinary selection. There are tens of thousands of beads available inside, all chosen by Ms. Roesler on her travels. Beads can be made from anything, she said.

“Stones, bones, wood, ceramic, brass, glass, silver, gold, anything you can think of, and of course, wampum,” she said. “We have all mediums and all styles, and I pick things that I like because if it doesn’t sell, I’m stuck with it.”

These days, she said, wrap bracelets are popular, but there’s no telling what might take off. One summer, ceramic beads in the shape of South Park characters were huge.

Ms. Roesler’s business sense today remains as keen as it was when she first started. It comes from, she said, a low-key source — conversations at the kitchen table with her father, an accountant. Her eye for design is influenced by her mother. A degree in costume design helps, too.

The shopping and traveling element of finding beads has always been the best part of the job, though, and Beadniks’ selection is largely the result of Ms. Roesler’s connections in Asia. The relationships she’s developed with vendors in Nepal, Thailand and Indonesia are indispensable. She travels to the countries at least once a year.

“Most of the time I can tell you where I bought it and what I paid for it,” she said of the bead stocks. “But you can’t ask me what I ate for breakfast. That’s just how my mind works.”

Beadniks will remain open until December of this year as Ms. Roesler searches for a buyer and finalizes permanent relocation to Virginia Beach. She says she will miss her beads, but with the wholesale catalog still going strong, there will likely still be an Island connection for her.

“I’ll still be a vendor,” she said.



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