

Mother's Day is coming up! Stop in and meet Michelle and Eric Hoff at their store at 1546 Route 9, just across from Walmart, to find the perfect gift for the special day!



COVER STORY

The Hoff Family

By Jenna E. Caputo

Giving a Personal Touch to Life's Important Moments

The first thing I notice when I walk into Hoff Jewelers is how bright and inviting everything is. The second thing I notice is that everyone has smiles on their faces. There is an air of comfort – like I just stepped into my friend's living room instead of being about to make what could be a stressful purchase. Despite my crazy morning, I was instantly at ease.

Eric Hoff was born in Troy and moved to Clifton Park when he was 5 years old. He has lived in Saratoga County ever since. His childhood activities were pretty typical of a kid – playing outside with friends, watching movies and snowmobiling.

But when he was a teenager, he began to sell Swarovski crystal jewelry at Clifton Country Mall and Six Flags. After meeting the manager of Kay Jewelers, he applied for the assistant manager position at 19 years old. It was while he was working there that he became fascinated with the whole jewelry industry. His interest soon focused on jewelry fabrication and repair and he took an apprenticeship at the repair shop for Kay's. After working there for three years, he bought the shop at 23 years old and started Hoff Jewelers, quickly becoming one of the largest repair stores in upstate New York, servicing

25+ other stores in addition to his own work.

Since then, he has become a Gemological Institute of America Graduate Gemologist (the most respected designation in the industry) and has continued to educate himself in many of the cutting edge technologies, including CAD/CAM design, C&C Milling and laser welding. Eric is known for being a leader in the latest technologies in this area and was the first to obtain a laser welder. Using his experience in these advances, Eric has been able to build his business into a full service store – allowing his customers full

repairs, as well as a general retail store and custom jewelry cut right on the premises.

Education is important to Eric. He continues to keep up with his own education on the latest advances and re-certifies himself every year as an AGS Certified Gemologist. Members of AGS are required to hold to the highest code of ethics and business practices in the industry. These standards are so high that only a small percentage of those who apply are actually awarded the membership.

Eric met his wife Michelle through a mutual friend and they now have two children – Mitchell, 17 and Madison, 15 and their dog, Charlie. Their family enjoys getting out and taking advantage of the many benefits of living in the Capital District, including going to the race track, Lake George and the State Museum, as well as skiing/ snowboarding, kayaking, camping and traveling.

Mitchell plays recreational soccer and lacrosse, is part of the Future Business Leaders and is co-chair of the school spirit committee. He has been instrumental in increasing school community involvement and awareness in all of the school's sports activities. Madison is a part of the Best Buddies program (an organization that creates opportunities for one-to-one friends, integrated employment and leadership development for people with disabilities), participating in the group's events like dances and field trips, and also enjoys helping out at the store.

In fact, both kids have been involved in the business from a very young age and often accompany their parents to the gem shows, which can be located all around the country and abroad. The major show for the Hoff's, however, is the Vegas trip in May/ June. This is where they plan their inventory for the year, learn about the

year's colors, the latest styles/trends and choose their merchandise for the store. They always try to keep things up to date and they personally hand pick everything themselves. In fact, the Hoff's are actively involved in the whole process for the customer. They even go to these shows often with a particular customer in mind to select a piece specifically for them. They have a personal interest in everything that is going on in the store. The Hoff's do not just fulfill the role of "supervisor," and it shows in all they do.

"My favorite part about this business is the ability to serve the community I have called home for



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almost all my life," says Eric. "Buying jewelry is almost always a very personal experience and I am happy to be a part of such important times in people's lives." In fact, community is one of the things they love most about Clifton Park. "It seems so big, but it's really small," says Michelle. "There is a lot of community support and involvement here." "It has a home town feel to it," Eric adds. "It's still really a small town."

The Hoff's are instrumental in the community themselves, and

offer a corporate buying program for businesses that would like to buy their holiday or sales awards gifts for their company. And for the customer that is looking for a more personal gift, you can expect to gain full knowledge of your possible purchase before you walk out the door – whether if you plan to buy or not. It is important to the Hoff's that their customers are knowledgeable about what they are looking for and are educated for these very important decisions, regardless of where they are shopping.

After chatting with the Hoff's and walking around the new standalone store that was built in 2010 on Route 9 across from Walmart, the thing I noticed the most was their sincerity and their honesty. The passion for the craft behind custom jewelry and repair was certainly evident, but the honest, down-to-earth interaction was what impressed me the most. Whether if they were talking about their family activities or the business itself, it was filled with laughter and frankness. It is obvious why the Hoff family has been considered such a trusted fixture in the community for the

last 25 years! ■

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