

Poag's Sons Join Him in Business: "It's nice to be here and watch them grow in their careers"



Upstairs, a forest of grandfather clocks bide their time, awaiting the admiring glances they're sure to get. Downstairs, music chimes from an antique music box, the golden disc beckoning the listener near. Gathered among these clocks and collection of music boxes, hundreds of other gems of beauty tempt customers at James O. Poag, Jewellers Ltd. Across the street at Poag's China and Gifts are more temptations. "We've always tried to have a

quality image," said James "Jim" Poag Sr., founder of the business. "And, we also carry quality merchandise in every price range."

Servicing a large cross-section of customers was Jim's goal when he began the business back in September, 1959. Jim was interested in repairing clocks and watches when he was a lad, and started working in a jewelry store after school. In 1959, a jeweler in Strathroy, John R. McIntosh, died, and Jim bought the business and moved to Strathroy. "I started with nothing, so I had only one way to go," Jim said. Jim had been in town two years when he met Judy, a young woman working at an insurance office across the street from Jim's business. They married, and now Judy, their two sons, and a daughter-in-law work in the family business.

Jim Jr. joined the business in 1986 after attending the Gemological Institute of America in California. He is a graduate gemologist, and took courses in goldsmithing, diamond setting and appraising. Jeffrey joined James O. Poag Jewellers in 1990. He is involved in sales, clock service calls, and specializes in goldsmithing. Jim Jr.'s wife, Denise, runs the china and gift shop, located at 95 Frank Street.

Poag's China and Gifts features all major brands of dinnerware including Royal Doulton, Royal Albert, Wedgwood and Noritake; crystal stemware; wedding invitations; and a free bridal registry. They also have gifts ranging from Hummel figurines, brass, silver and crystal to baby gifts, leather wallets and Henkle knives. "We have a wide variety of gift items," Denise said. "If someone comes in looking for a gift, we can show them hundreds of things in their price range." This carries on the business philosophy on which Jim founded the business. "We try to cover all customers, and give value and service," Jim Sr. said.

James O. Poag, Jewellers Ltd. at 94 Frank Street, offers diamonds and loose gem stones, gold jewelry, costume jewelry, watches, a repair service and the largest selection of clocks in Ontario. Both stores have a money-back policy. "If you buy a gift and someone doesn't like it, they can exchange it or get a refund," Jim explained.

The Poags attend international shows to find unusual quality gifts. "We're always looking to find something different not in other stores that's of good value," Judy said. They credit their staff for helping maintain their standard of service. Between both stores, they employ 10 people, and up to 15 during the busy Christmas season. "We have a very good staff," Judy said. "Most of them have been with us a number of years, from five to fifteen years. They are knowledgeable in what they sell." Jim Sr. says they try to treat customers the way they would like to be treated themselves. "We do our best to please the customer," he said.

Both stores are open from 9:30 a.m. until 5:30 p.m. Monday through Thursday, and Saturday; and from 9:30 a.m. until 8:30 p.m. on Friday.

James O Poag, Jewellers Ltd. and Poag's China and Gifts are joining a new marketing system which will allow them access to gems and other items from around the world. "Someone in South Carolina is looking for a certain dinner plate, and we found one for them," Jim Jr. said, explaining the concept of the new computer marketing. Jim Jr.'s connections as a graduate gemologist also gave Poag's access to gems from around the world at the best prices.

When their sons were growing up, Jim Sr. said he never gave much thought to whether or not they would have careers in the family business. But, he is glad they have. "It's nice that they are carrying on," Jim Sr. said. "And it's nice to be here and watch them grow in the business and in their careers."

Jim Sr. doesn't expect he will ever retire completely. "I enjoy the business too much," he said. "The jewelry business is an interesting business. You have to appreciate the gems and the workmanship in them. It's challenging."