

AFFILIATE MEMBER PROFILE

KEVIN L. PUGH : PUGH'S DESIGNER JEWELERS



While walking around the AGTA GemFair™ Tucson, you may meet a confident, yet humble, gentleman moving through the crowds. Kevin Pugh, the Member of Record for Pugh's Designer Jewelers, is well respected in his community and has paid his dues in the jewelry industry.

Will you share about yourself—where you grew up, and your family today?
I grew up in Zanesville, Ohio, the fourth of five children. I have seven children and 12 grandchildren at the moment.

Tell us the fascinating story of how you got your start in the jewelry industry.
My father was a local watchmaker/Registered Jeweler in a small, full-service AGS store. I began at age 15, building and engraving trophies. I learned to size rings, set gemstones, and do general repairs during high school. In my freshman year of college, the store was growing and I was needed to run the shop. So I quit school and never looked back.

Tell us about your journey from your beginning in the jewelry business to today. Where you trained as a jeweler, etc.?
I had little formal training in jewelry repair and construction methods, but I had the freedom to try new techniques, and I have always lived by the motto "the impossible just takes longer." A plaque in front of my bench, visible to the public, reads "Those who say it cannot be done should not interrupt the person who is doing it."

I attended seminars at AGS events and at jewelry shows, as well as numerous talks given at the annual Tucson show over 20+ years. In 1990, I attended a week-long hand engraving seminar at GRS headquarters in Kansas—one of the smartest things I've ever done. I have a fairly large library of jewelry making books I refer to.

Who are custom jewelers you admire and respect?

Along the way I have maintained communication with a few other journeyman gold-smiths that I call from time to time. Timothy La Prairie, from Michigan, and Robert DuFault, from Chicago, are not well known, but do extraordinary work.

Tell us more about the person who introduced you to the jewelry industry and about your love for colored gemstones.

We always carried a sizable amount of color in our store, so it was natural to gravitate towards the better and more unusual gems. In Tucson, we bought colored gemstones from Michael Dyber, David Brackna, Bernd Munsteiner, Sherris Cottier Shenk to name a few. I soon acquired many more gemstones than I could mount, so now my customers have a lot to choose from when we are designing a custom piece.

Who were your early mentors in the colored gemstone / jewelry trade?

I have never really followed other jewelers, but I have been influenced more by the gem cutters, as their cutting configurations direct my designs to complement their unique shapes.

What initially attracted you to AGTA?

I heard that some guys in pickup trucks were having a swap meet in the desert where it was warm in February, and I was

in. Once I started going, I couldn't stop. We always stay at a dude ranch and drive in; you can't beat the experience.

What is your favorite colored gemstone? And why?

That's like asking what your favorite chocolate is. What's not to like? The Corundums have great hardness and beauty. Probably Sapphire; I like the finest color with good saturation but not too dark. When I can find them, I especially like Sapphires that exhibit a slight red overtone, which I sell to Tanzanite lovers, who are hard on their jewelry; or for rings. Really, I like them all if they are exceptional: rich aquas, dark blue Zircons, deep green tsavorite Garnets, pink or green Tourmalines, and the list goes on.

Tell us about the changes to the trade that you have witnessed through the years. Also, how are you guiding your firm to meet today's challenges?

I am disappointed with the direction of the trade. For years there was a relationship of respect between wholesalers and retailers. Now, greed has crept into that relationship and many of our suppliers are also selling to our customers at wholesale prices. This started with colored gemstones, but now has spread to loose Diamonds. Some jewelry companies and watch companies are following suit. Very soon, as the internet continues to

Below: Brooch convertible to pendant featuring blue Sapphires and Diamonds



grow, there will be an exponential shift of business from brick and mortar to online sales. If this was just a shift in where the jewelry is sold, you could adjust how you do business; but you cannot compete with your suppliers. Many present-day jewelers will be doing more and more custom and repairs and selling less going forward, needing fewer employees and less square footage.

Please share your thoughts on responsible sourcing and social responsibility in the colored gemstone industry.

We try very hard to buy all our gemstones from reputable sources that have earned our trust. We will turn down offers that are “too good to be true” rather than chance supporting illegal or immoral activities.

Tell us about Pugh’s Designer Jewelers today. Who works with you in your store?

We have three full-time employees, as well as a goldsmith, and myself. We have several bridal lines and a fair amount of colored gemstones mounted. We have a lot of loose colored gemstones after 40 years of buying. We are changing our marketing strategy to an omni-channeling model, calling for the balancing of brick and mortar, online and social media. We have developed a very strong reputation for custom design, hand fabrication, repairs, and antique restorations. I have lots of pictures of custom pieces on the walls of our store.

What has your membership in AGTA meant for/to you?

It has been natural for us to be associated with AGTA since we align closely with the ethical business practices AGTA promotes. Attendance at the yearly show, and attending many seminars there, has been a highlight of the year for us. The tapes of the seminars have been very useful, and the many contacts we have made here have been invaluable to us. We use the Source Directory, educational and promotional materials, and look forward to



reading *Prism* magazine.

What is your favorite colored gemstone “Tucson Story”?

I bought a bi-color Sapphire, 8 x 6 oval, from Dudley Blauwet at the Tucson show. It was a strong yellow on one end, and a strong blue on the other, with nice separation. A lady walked into my store and told me she had just lost her husband and that he had never bought her jewelry. But on his death bed, he asked her to

promise him she would take some money and buy herself a ring since he knew he had neglected her love and dedication to him. I pulled out the bicolor Sapphire, set in a bypass mounting with a couple of small Diamonds set with it. She loved the ring, and I asked her what her birthstone was—she said Sapphire. I asked what his was and she said it was November (yellow/golden). We both shed a tear of thanksgiving.

You are a citizen of the world. What is your favorite city?

Large city is Toronto; very clean, international, and young. Small city is Estes Park Colorado and the surrounding mountains.

What is your favorite hotel?

Not a hotel. White Stallion Ranch north of Tucson, run by the finest people you will ever meet.

What is your favorite restaurant?

Phil’s Seafood in Zanesville, Ohio. Fresh seafood flown from the coast daily for 35+ years—second to none.

What was your best meal ever?

A fresh seafood platter at a little restaurant on the Adriatic seacoast in Croatia with my wife.

Left Top: 18K white gold and palladium pendant featuring a Tanzanite accented with Diamonds.

Left Bottom: 8K white gold and palladium ring featuring a Tanzanite accented with Diamonds.

Right Top: David Brackna cut this incredible fantasy-cut Ametrine pendant.

Right Bottom: 18K white gold and palladium earrings featuring Tanzanites accented with Diamonds.

What is your favorite off-the-beaten-path destination?

Hiking in Shenandoah National Park near Skyline Drive in Virginia.

Tell us something about yourself that most people don’t know.

Many people can make custom jewelry. But listening carefully to my customers, asking the right questions, and then intuitively offering solutions that make their



eyes light up, makes the long hours at the bench worth it. This experience is only matched by the treasured moment when they first see their completed piece. My work becomes a part of their story, and often carries meaning far beyond a written description.

By David M Baker, G.G.,
Membership and Education Manager