



Dan Smith

Beckie Spaid, Chad Amrhein and Paula Amrhein at the jewelry store.

The AmRhein's legacy >

Executive Summary:

No matter how you spell it, the Amrhein family has had a long run in the Roanoke Valley and it doesn't seem to be slowing down in either its wine or jewelry businesses.

By Kathy Surace

When Fred Amrhein opened his first jewelry store in 1921, little did he imagine it would survive for 90 years—to date—and involve four generations of his family. F.C Amrhein's was originally on Campbell Avenue in

Roanoke, providing jewelry design and repair. On Nov. 5, 2011 AmRhein's celebrated its 90th anniversary, after receiving the Legacy Award from the Roanoke Chamber of Commerce in October.

AmRhein's had a humble beginning with slow, but steady growth. By the 1950s Fred had relocated his business to Salem, while his twin sons, Russell and Oliver, moved the Roanoke store to Kirk Avenue. In 1975 the company's name was changed to Amrhein's Jewelers and Fred's grandson, Russ, joined the other family members in the business.

After years of success with jewelry, in 1992 Amrhein's expanded to include formalwear, providing bridalwear, tuxedos, prom dresses, cocktail attire and accessories. Formalwear proved to be a good fit, so to speak, and soon another location opened near Tanglewood

How the hell do you spell 'Amrhein'? >

Kathy Surace's challenge, first, was to spell the name right and there are challenges when writing about the Amrheins' German family roots and family businesses. You'll note that in this story, there are several presentations, all right. You will also note that during his lifetime William Shakespeare spelled his name nine different ways.

Simple explanation from Kathy: "I spelled Amrhein's differently throughout. The family name is with a small 'r' and the new logo is with a capital 'R'. Also, when I listed it as it was named years ago, I spelled Amrhein's as it was spelled at that time." That clear? Probably not, but read on.

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Mall. At that time Russ's son, Chad, joined the business, becoming the fourth generation of Amrhein entrepreneurs.


Always diverse, in 1996 Amrhein's ventured in a new direction when Russ, pursuing his lifelong interest in agriculture, planted grape vines on Bent Mountain. In 1999, Amrhein Wine Cellars opened its doors and Russ shouldered responsibility for the winery, while Chad ran the retail business. The winery was the 62nd established in Virginia, out of more than 190 wineries in Virginia today.

Today Amrhein's is still led by family members. Russ focuses on the winery. Paula Amrhein, his wife, runs the Tanglewood jewelry store, along with Chad, general manager of the jewelry and formalwear divisions. Chad's wife, Beckie Spaid, is marketing manager for the Amrhein's winery and retail locations.

Chad Amrhein believes Amrhein's has not only survived for 90 years, but has thrived, because, "Treating people right is the backbone of our business. That's why we have a loyal client base. Being innovative, as in the Roanoke and Salem charm bracelets, is important. Give your customers what they want and treat them fairly."

Amrhein's employees are long-term and trained in the "Amrhein's way," says Chad. There is a jeweler on staff to design that one-of-a-kind piece and hand-engage it—a dying art.

In recent years, Amrhein's has fine-tuned its marketing efforts with Beckie's expertise. She created a company website with a link to each division, showcasing the products and services Amrhein's offers and promoting winery events. Beckie points out that



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Dan Smith

Russ Amrhein runs the family's winery.

business going, one might wonder why Russ Amrhein built a new business from the ground up and now works harder than ever. "I'm an entrepreneur from way back." Russ says. He raised and sold cattle and hogs at one time, so growing grapes is a pleasure. Russ enthusiastically declares, "Running a winery is absolutely the best business I have ever run. The

Amrhein's "can take a couple from engagement ring to wedding reception."


Recently, Beckie updated the AmRhein's brand, designing a new logo, branding ads and billboards. The 'r' in AmRhein's is now capitalized, reflecting its German roots, which means "on the Rhine." Soon changes will appear in wine bottle labels, jewelry box designs, garment bags, store signs and wine glasses.

QR codes will appear on marketing materials and AmRhein's products so Smart phone users can access the website quickly. Beckie says, "Every year we update our marketing plan to stay current with our customers."

With such a successful jewelry and formalwear

wines open the doors for everything". He has met senators and governors, and has been to Europe to other wineries and businesses, bringing a gift of wine and creating new friendships.

In the future, Russ hopes to extend the brand to neighboring states. Exporters interviewed him recently for possible opportunities exporting to China, "an exciting idea" to Russ. He loves introducing people to his wines, saying, "The only person you have to please is yourself when wine tasting. The day of the wine snob is over."

With progressive ideas, solid products and services, and a commitment to customer service, AmRhein's seems to be ensuring future growth and longevity. 

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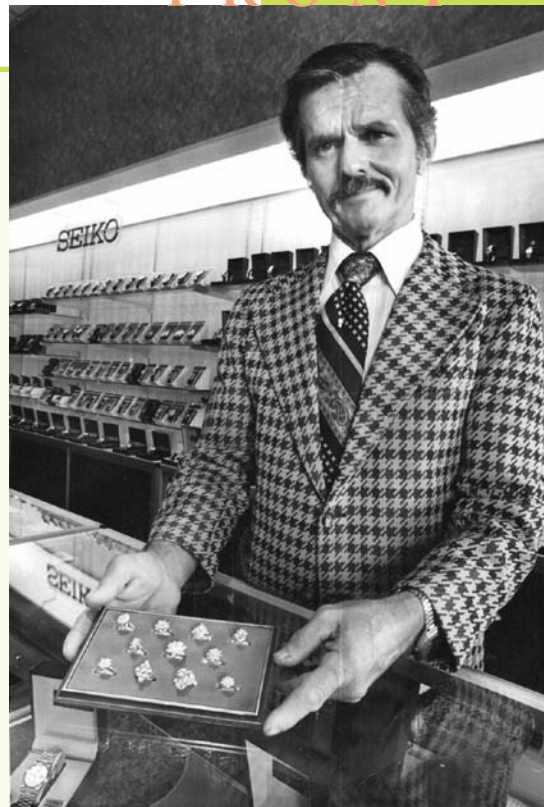
Timeline >

- 1921—First store established by Fred Amrhein as F.C. Amrhein's on Campbell Avenue in Roanoke, providing jewelry design and repair.

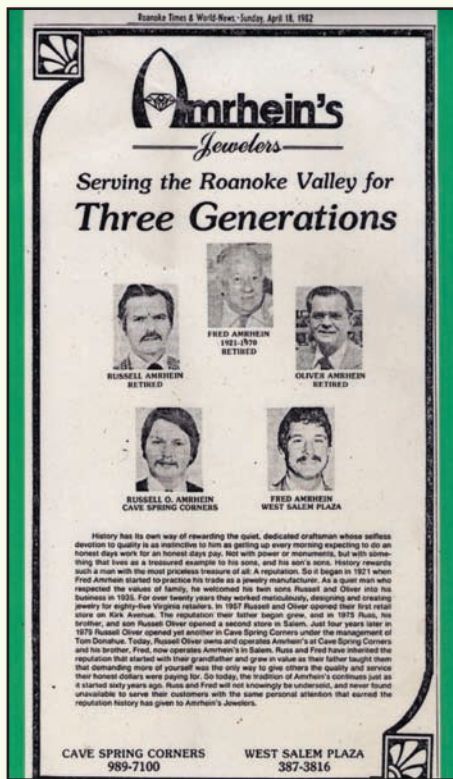


Early F.C. Amrhein & Son ad.

- 1950s—Fred relocated to Main Street in Salem and his 2 sons relocated the Roanoke store to Kirk Avenue in Roanoke.
- 1975—Store name changed to Amrhein's Jewelers. Fred's grandson, Russ, joined the company and extended service to Salem.



Grandfather Russell Amrhein at the West Salem Store.



Amrhein's ad, 1982.

- 1992—Expanded again to include formalwear and changed name to Amrhein's Brides, Formals & Fine Jewelry.
- 1995—Second location was opened on Ogden Road in Roanoke for jewelry and bridal & formal wear and Russ's son, Chad, joined the business.
- 1996—Russ planted the first grape vines on Bent Mountain.
- 1999—AmRhein Wine Cellars opened its doors. Russ ran the winery while Chad took over the retail business. The winery was the 62nd in Virginia, out of over 190 wineries in the Commonwealth today.
- 2011—AmRhein's celebrates 90th year of business with a new logo and branding. Also receive Legacy Award from the Roanoke Chamber of Commerce.