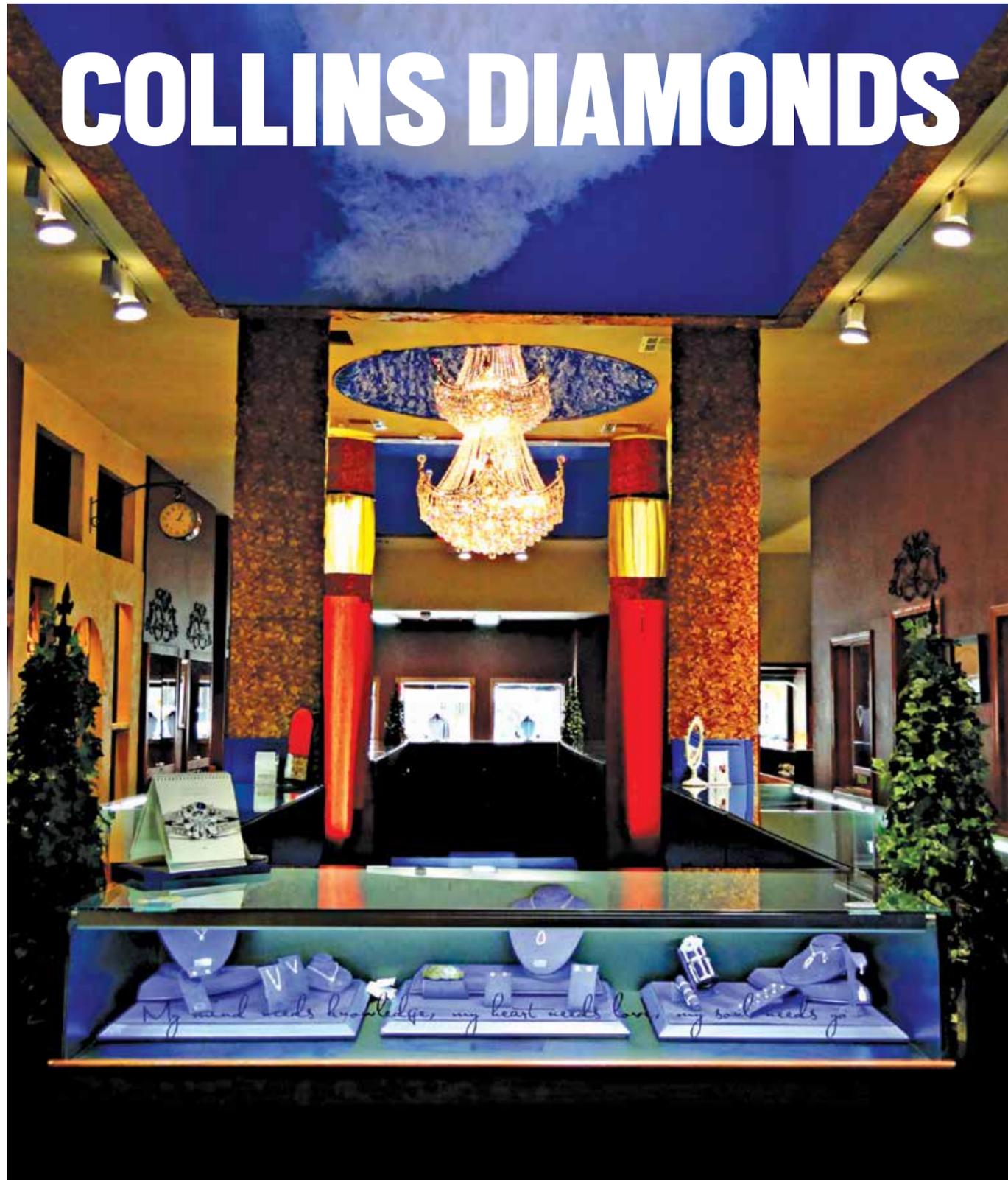


COLLINS DIAMONDS



QUICK FACTS

URL: www.collins-diamonds.com
 LOCATION: Liberal, KS
 OWNERS: Audi and Karla Bartel
 FOUNDED: 1956
 OPENED FEATURED LOCATION: 2003
 LAST RENOVATED: 2011
 FULL-TIME EMPLOYEES: 3
 AREA: 1,800 square feet
 LOCATIONS: 2
 TOP BRANDS: Leo Ingwer, Elma Gil, Gottlieb & Sons, Shah Diamonds, Rego, A&D Gems, Citizen Watch, William Levine, MK Diamonds, Bauman-Massa
 ONLINE PRESENCE
 FACEBOOK LIKES: 5,185
 ALEXA TRAFFIC RANK: 22,865,048

FUN ON THE PLAINS

A KANSAS STORE PROVES LOCATION DOES NOT DICTATE LUXURY

BY EILEEN McCLELLAND

Morgan Bartel of Collins Diamonds in Liberal, KS, goes to great lengths to encourage browsers to feel comfortable while they accessorize.

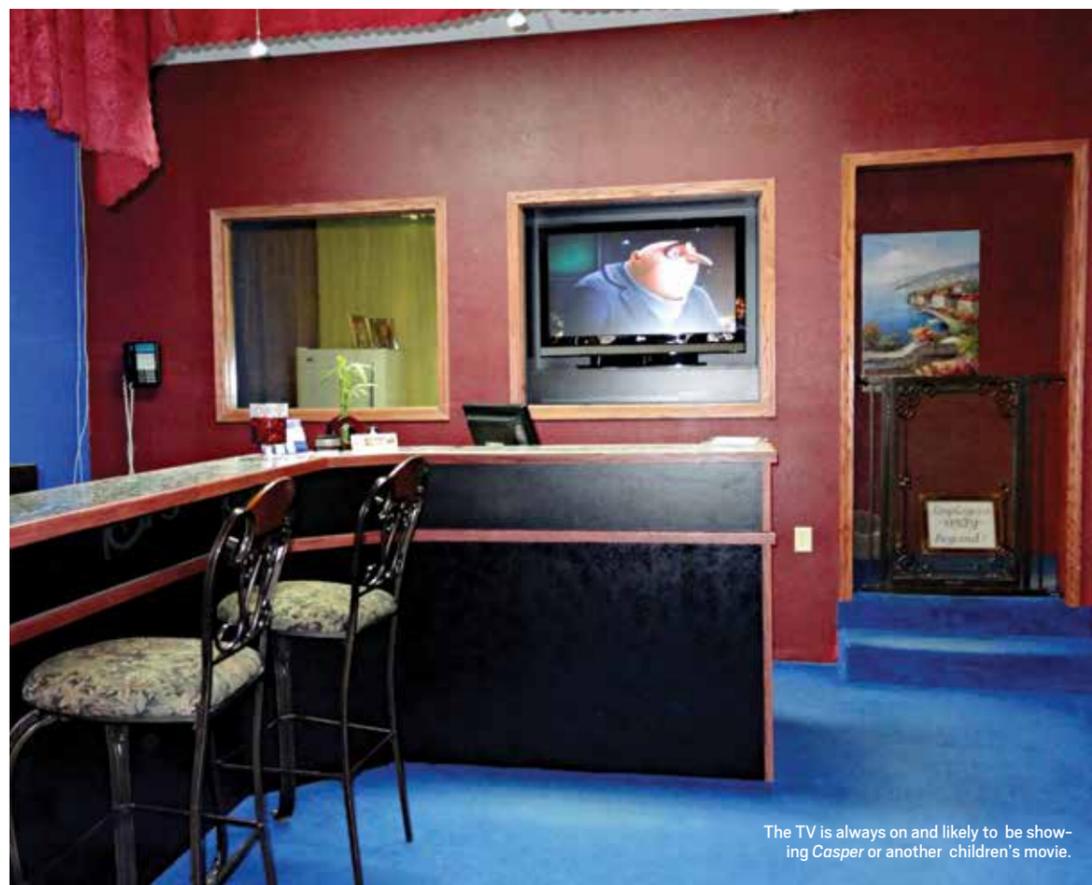
"We want everyone to feel like if they want to come in in pajamas and try on a \$90,000 ring, they can," Morgan says. "If a new customer leaves and we don't know everything about them, we feel like we haven't done our job. We all like to chat."

The family-owned store, managed by Morgan and her husband, Colton, is designed to attract young people — in everything from the staff's laid-back attitude to its playlist of funky, upbeat music. They want customers — and future customers, too — to feel completely at home.

There's a fully stocked bar, two sitting areas with plush, champagne-colored leather sofas and a 45-inch flat-screen TV for sports, slideshows from photo shoots or classic movies. Everyone is offered something to drink, a



A background in theater helped Morgan Bartel, pictured here, add drama to marketing photos.



The TV is always on and likely to be showing *Casper* or another children's movie.

snack or seasonal candy.

"A little girl comes in with her mom and we'll give the mom a Diet Dr. Pepper and the girl wants a Sierra Mist in a wine glass. Everybody really enjoys just coming in and relaxing. The TV is always on. You might see little kids eating candy corn, sitting at the bar and watching 'Casper.' Lately visitors have included the teenage daughters of regular customers.

It began when one girl was having a bad day, and came in with a friend on the theory that since diamonds are a girl's best friend, she would likely cheer up just by being in their proximity. They showed up wearing their sweatpants and hoodies, clutching cups of coffee, and



Morgan encouraged them to try on tiaras, necklaces, rings and earrings.

"They sat there with their tiaras and jewelry and talked to us for a few hours," she says. "So now every month they come in and try things on and bring their friends.

"They hadn't realized they could try things on — and a lot of jewelry stores don't realize the power of that," Morgan says. "Their boyfriends are already coming in and talking to us about promise rings," Morgan says. "We just plant the seed and water it."

Although Collins Diamonds is in a small town, it is different enough to attract customers from a five-state area — Colorado, Oklahoma, Texas and New Mexico, in addition to its home state of Kansas. They've had visitors drive eight hours from Denver to shop in the store.

"I like to say it's just the fact that we don't change our personality per customer," Morgan says. "We are exactly the same for anyone, a little sarcastic, and we like to make things fun. Jewelers get too caught up in making everything too serious. The merchandise is unique and it stands out, but it's also comfortable to wear. We tell everybody that location does not dictate luxury. You could live in the smallest town in the world and still appreciate fine jewelry."

Colton and Morgan took over management of the



TRY THIS

"SINCE WE ARE ON A TIGHT MARKETING BUDGET," Morgan Bartel says, "we have had to be creative in terms of advertising." So staff members and customers have modeled jewelry for photo shoots. The first took place for Halloween 2011 with a glam-goth theme. The photos are displayed on the store's TV screen and will be made into catalogs.

COLLINS DIAMONDS has had success with selling black diamond studs and blue diamond studs to self-purchasers at a tempting price point of \$250 and up.

PLAYLIST

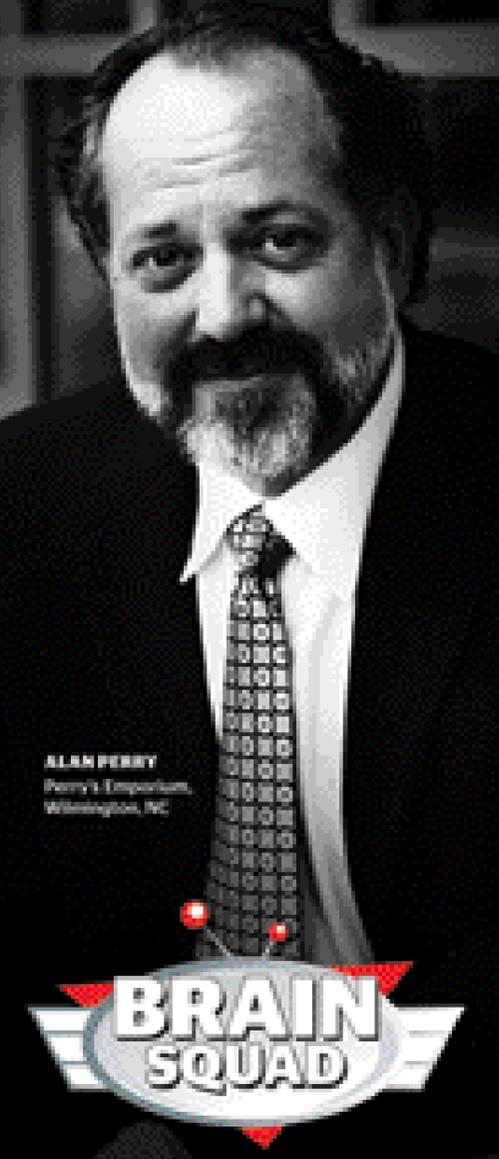
NOT THE TYPICAL LOVEY-DOVEY MUSIC. Top 40, upbeat hits, sometimes a little edgier, or classic rat pack, or a mix of country. The mix gets changed weekly.

TRUE TALE

"WE REALLY have to enunciate PANIC in our Christmas Eve panic party because for years we had people coming in thinking they were coming to a party party." — MORGAN BARTEL

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HEARSAY

"OH, MY GOSH. I'VE NEVER SEEN BLUE CARPET IN PERSON."



SHOP TALK

PITA is an acronym for "pain in the ass," otherwise known as customers who try to find problems when none exist.



STRONG PROMO

WITH A shoestring marketing budget, Collins opted for in-store photo shoots featuring staff and customers, resulting in ads that could have come from Madison Avenue.



The store's distinctive color theme pairs maroon and blue.



store when Colton's parents, Audie and Karla Bartel, opened a second store in Corpus Christi in February 2012 and headed south.

Morgan, who worked in musical theater choreography in San Francisco before her marriage, has been in the business for four years. "I swore when my husband and I started dating that I'd never work in the family business, but I fell in love with it and went to school for it."

Although Collins Diamonds carries brands, the emphasis is on branding Collins Diamonds. "Other than Hearts On Fire, we don't have the name of the brand on



the cases. We will tell them who the vendor is of course, but we want them to say we got a Collins Diamonds piece and not forget where they got it."

The store itself is well known for its color scheme — bold blue carpeting, blue door and contrasting maroon walls. "Our main goal when someone steps into our store is for them to feel as if they have jumped into a giant jewelry box. Karla wanted a color that was regal without being too stuffy. It used to be maroon and gold and white before Karla brought in imperial blue." So now everything from the door to the tissue in the gift-wrapping and jewelry boxes is the same shade of signature blue.

Other cool features include: Eight individually lighted display cases that surround a floor-to-ceiling wall fountain topped with a Parisian-style depot clock. Numerous sandblasted glass tables have the store's logo and brand name on them. The roof is equipped with a giant diamond fixture that lights up the night sky.

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FIVE COOL THINGS

THE PANIC PARTY. Every Christmas Eve, Collins Diamonds stays open as long as needed. "We serve cocktails and walk around in Santa hats," Morgan says. "It's not a high-pressure sales situation. We're here to figure out what you need and wrap it up. We have guys who didn't even realize it was Christmas the next day. Gentlemen have called panicked, schitzo, almost, after hours, *after* the panic party. We live 15 miles from our store but we've driven in in the evening or Christmas morning. You never know how big a sale is going to be."

THE CHANDELIER. A 2011 renovation included the addition of a 4-foot-high rotunda in the ceiling to enclose a 6-foot Swarovski crystal chandelier. The chandelier is complemented by four fabric-covered columns with tulle accents. Owner Karla Bartel also designed and created two "cloud" chandeliers from white tulle. "She is a huge decorating magazine buff and she hoards them and marks down things that inspire her," Morgan says.



"She found a chandelier made of white tulling she liked, but we had ceiling fans and nowhere to put them. One day we came in and she had someone taking the ceiling fans out. She hand-cut the tulling, and did the lighting too," Morgan explains.

CROSS MARKETING. Collins Diamonds brews and serves coffee made by a local coffee house, which in turn, displays Collins Diamonds' QR codes and other marketing material. "They get tons of people in there every day," Morgan says.

"Don't underestimate the power of people talking about you. The town talks about us. We also do cross marketing with a hot salon in town. Hair stylists talk."

QR CODES. They've also added their QR code to the programs distributed at high school basketball games. "We noticed a major surge on our Facebook page right around the time we added QR codes. Within eight months Facebook likes grew from 75 to more than 4,500." But the results have gone beyond virtual. "Now all the girls come in when they want to buy their first pair of diamond earrings," Morgan says.

WILD WINDOWS. Customers drop by just to see if the unique, often funny, window themes and displays have been changed. "We have had first-time customers walk into our store just because they say they loved our windows so much they had to see what the rest of our store looked like," Morgan says.

