

'Junior' designer who sparkles

By TERE GREENDORFER

Although 17-year-old Danna Weiss of Short Hills won't have her driver's license for another month, she already has a thriving business designing and making jewelry.

The talented teenager, a junior at Millburn High School who is on the cheerleading team and is a member of MASH (Millburn Association for Student's Help), tells how she started and built her business less than a year ago.

"Crystals were a big craze among teenagers, so I took apart some old earrings and made a necklace from it. Everyone admired it so much that I went to a store and tried to sell it. That was last December. I was wearing a sweatshirt and leggings so no one took me seriously," she explains. "But I don't let a lot stand in my way. I went home and talking very maturely on the phone, I made an appointment with Gotham City, a popular teenage clothing shop in Millburn. I dressed up, took my sample case and sold everything outright. Then I saw a friend in school wearing a piece. She had bought it without knowing it was mine!

"To begin, I borrowed \$50 from my mother. I paid her back and had some money left over. At the time, I bought everything retail because I didn't know how to buy wholesale. But I did a lot of research in accessory magazines and found sources. Then I started spinning the jewelry out like crazy. I make everything myself and also sell to other stores in New Jersey, Georgia and Florida."

Explaining how her business grew,

the young designer says, "I started with pendants, then some people asked for earrings to match and then bracelets and pins. I keep up with the fashion trends so I know what's popular. Now I buy supplies wherever I find them." As an example she shows clay beads from Israel and a bracelet made from Israeli telephone coins set in sterling. She also uses beads from Czechoslovakia and Peru, and fashions little people out of wire.

"I work after school, after my homework," she says. "I do my own bookkeeping, order my own cards and tags and I pay for it all myself! I get ideas from materials I use. I see a stone and work around it. And I make everything with a front and a back—I don't like things to turn over.

"As a teen designing for teens, I find that kids love my jewelry because they're so into crystal and anything from the earth," says Weiss who comes from a family of achievers. Her father, Donald, is president of the White Storage and Retrieval Co. in Kenilworth; her mother, Alison, is a sculptor, and her 20-year-old brother Eric is varsity soccer captain at the University of Maryland.

"I'm very lucky," Weiss says. "So far I've had no disappointments. As for the future, I want to get into a good college so I have a regular college life. After that I want to study something in design." Uncertain about what kind of designing she'll eventually do, Weiss says, "I want to be known for being very original—different but with good taste."



Above, Sharon Jacobsen of Short Hills, Danna Weiss and Tanya Baracr of Short Hills model jewelry by Weiss; Weiss of Short Hills, left, works on designs in her home. The jewelry is available at Cactus in Livingston, Rising Star in West Orange, Lucon in Millburn and Moondance in Summit.



Photos by Joe Egan