



Georgia Jewelers Association

The Official Georgia Gems Newsletter

GEORGIAGEMS | 2nd QUARTER | JUNE 2026

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Georgia Wins The Jewelers Impact Initiative from Jewelers of America



Mark Butler, President
KE Butler & Company
Vidalia, Ga



Upcoming Events:

| | |
|------------------------------------|---|
| IJO | July 25-28, 2026 Louisville, KY |
| RJO | July 31 - August 3, 2026 Lexington, KY |
| Atlanta Jewelry Show | August 21st- 23rd, 2026 Atlanta, Ga |
| Georgia Jewelers Convention | October 2nd-4th, 2026 Rome, Ga |

PUBLICATION & DISTRIBUTION

Georgia Gems is owned and operated by the Georgia Jewelers Association, and association for profit, headquartered in Georgia. Each edition is mailed out over 200 members plus other individuals and companies who support the association.



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In 2009, I was the head coach of a high school basketball team. We had a player fall ill and he did not play a few games. In his first game back, his name was not listed in the score book. The rules are that any player not listed in the score book is ineligible to play that game, or the player can be added but at the cost of a technical foul on the coach. I didn't hesitate in making my decision; we added his name to the score book. The opposing team made both of their free throws and received the ball to start the game. We had to start the game down by two points and we lost the game. However, that player, his parents and many others came up to me after the game and thanked me for the decision I made.

Why am I sharing this story from an insignificant private high school basketball game on a random Tuesday night in LaGrange 17 years ago? In short, leadership.

Even though this was my first season as a head coach, I had spent the past six seasons as a college player, associate head coach and graduate assistant coach at three different colleges. Four head coaches and seven assistant coaches helped shape the head coach I became. One thing was consistent, treat the player like you would like to be treated in that same situation.

The Golden Rule is still applicable every day. If I was that player, I would have wanted to play in the game because I had done all I could to get back in playing shape after being sick. The player had done nothing wrong; it was the one in charge that made the mistake. I didn't even blame our scorekeeper. I was the head coach, and it was my responsibility. I didn't want the player to be penalized for my oversight. I could have told him he wasn't playing because I didn't think he was healthy enough and we could have had a better shot at winning. But I placed my mistake on public display.

In dealing with customers, vendors, employees and even family; treating others as you would like to be treated in that situation is still the standard. Leadership isn't always being right in the moment, but it's about making the best decision for the desired outcome. This does not mean sacrificing dignity or being walked over but take that stand for what you know to be in the best interest of your goals.

We are also putting the finishing touches on the speakers for the GJA Convention, and we will be releasing that as soon as all topics are confirmed. Other details will continue to be released as they are solidified. But please, mark your calendars for October 2nd through 4th and we will see you in Rome!

Mark Butler, President

Selling Relationships: An Interview with Jeff Koch

In the world of sales reps some stars shine brighter than the rest. With Jeff Koch of Bulova retiring and reflecting on his career, I thought it would be the perfect time for an interview. For our younger members, here are the sales tips Jeff Koch thought were most important to a successful sales career in the jewelry industry:

1. Mutually beneficial relationships are long-lasting and more profitable over time. When developing a sales relationship emphasize how working together is beneficial to both you and your customer.
2. In a world full of transactional sales, master consultative sales. Consultative sales are a customer-based selling technique where the salesperson listens to the customers' goals, needs, and context before offering a solution or product. This approach establishes the salesperson as a valuable resource and not just a point of contact for a transaction. It also allows your business the opportunity to provide new products that are hard to find or in demand. Knowing your customers helps you decide what to keep in inventory and what direction to steer your business.
3. Be different and unique. In a world that seems overly critical at times it is tempting to hide your unique and different qualities out of fear of criticism. The truth is that in a competitive sales environment standing out ensures your customer remembers you and thinks of your business first when their need for jewelry or services arises.
4. Word of mouth is your best advertisement. Advertising and name recognition will bring in a lot of new customers, but the best advertising comes from recommendations from other customers who have the same concerns and struggles that you have. A trusted and respected reputation can expand and support your traditional advertising efforts.
5. High pressure erodes trust and never works in a long-term relationship. There are many diverse types of sales strategies. High pressure sales strategies can help to close an initial sale, but in the long term a customer will avoid stores and businesses that make them uncomfortable. If your business sees a lot of returns or complaints, you may be pressuring your customers into decisions they regret.

“I do try to demonstrate and share what I believe is best, but if you feel forced to buy something, it’s a negative.”

~ Jeff Koch



Selling Relationships: An Interview with Jeff Koch

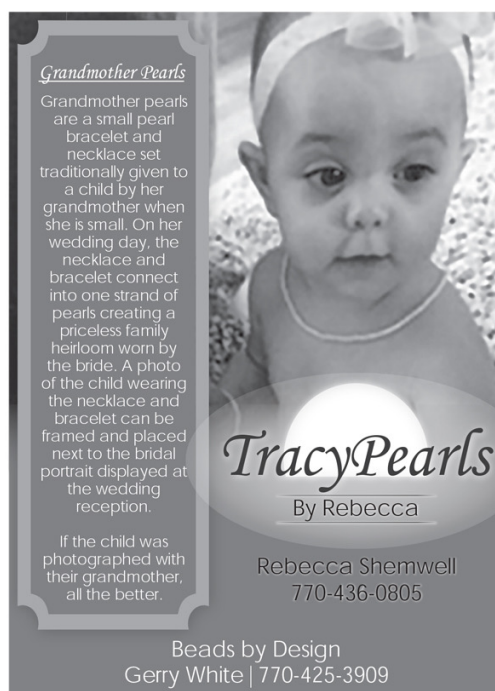
6. Hearing no just means they're not ready to buy...yet. Unsuccessful attempts at selling can feel like a personal insult. We tend to misinterpret a no as a permanent disinterest in our product or business. It is important to remember that a no is not forever. A no is a not right now. Conditions change, finances change, strategies change, and a no can change to yes just as easily as the weather changes from hour to hour and day to day. Learning to interpret a no as a "not yet" or "not now" can keep your confidence and motivation from taking an unhelpful hit.
7. When value meets expectations, a sale is made. Sales happen when the value of your product meets the expectations of the customer.

"Sometimes the value never meets the expectation, which is fine. You can never be all things to all people." ~Jeff Koch

Watching Jeff Koch has shown me how much a positive, friendly attitude matters. A smile and warm demeanor can be contagious and offer a welcome break from the stress of the workday. While cold calls and sales pitches often make people uncomfortable, a friendly check-in to see whether someone needs anything can brighten their day and turn the sales experience into one customers appreciate rather than avoid.

Jeff Koch's sales advice makes one thing clear: building trust with customers should be your top priority. That kind of relationship takes time, consistency, and long-term effort. These practices strengthen confidence in both the salesperson and the business, helping establish your company as a reliable source of products and services. Overall, strong relationships will do more to increase sales than even the most expensive advertising campaign.

"Any successful salesperson knows that sales are all about relationships and trust." ~Jeff Koch



Grandmother Pearls
Grandmother pearls are a small pearl bracelet and necklace set traditionally given to a child by her grandmother when she is small. On her wedding day, the necklace and bracelet connect into one strand of pearls creating a priceless family heirloom worn by the bride. A photo of the child wearing the necklace and bracelet can be framed and placed next to the bridal portrait displayed at the wedding reception.

If the child was photographed with their grandmother, all the better.

Tracy Pearls
By Rebecca

Rebecca Shemwell
770-436-0805

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Gerry White | 770-425-3909





Georgia Jewelers Association Jewelry Design Contest

Thank you for your entry to the Annual GJA Jewelry Design Competition. We appreciate your interest and support of the organization. Please fill out and submit this form along with your entry fee(s) to Thornton's Fine Jewelry 2830 Lexington Rd. Athens, GA 30605 by July 31, 2026. Finished pieces must be brought to the convention October 2nd, 2026. By sending in this application, you agree to all the rules and entry details. You may mail or email this form.

Name: _____

Store: _____

Address: _____

City, State, Zip: _____

Business Phone: _____

Cell: _____

Number of pieces entered: _____

Category 1A: _____

Category 1B: _____

Category 2: _____

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Total Entries: _____ x \$50.00 entry fee

Total Amount Sent: _____

Please send me an email to pay online

Email: _____

SEND ENTRY FORMS AND FEES BY 7/31/26 TO:

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Athens, GA 30605

Entry fee payable to: Georgia Jewelers Association

Christine Thornton Randall (706) 548-1633

Thorntonsjewelry@live.com

All finished entries must be brought to the convention. Entries remain the property of the person entering them. All entries will be picked up at the convention. GJA assumes no liability for loss or damages to any piece entered. Insurance for any piece entered will be the responsibility of the entrant.

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Promoting your Business on Facebook

Tips from Aleah Arundale

The Queen of Social Media and jewelry industry "It Girl", Aleah Arundale recently shared some great tips about working the Facebook algorithm to promote your business. When someone at the top of their field gives advice, we should all take notes. Here are Aleah's basics on how to market your jewelry store's Facebook page.

How the Facebook Algorithm Works

When you first make a post, Facebook shows it to 50 or so people. If people comment, like, etc., they

show it to 50 more, then 100. If NO ONE comments, it DIES and gets shown to no one else. So let's make sure we get posts that ENGAGE.

#1 Ask Questions. Facebook loves engagement. So when making a post TRY to make it engaging. Ask people to comment "Yes" or "Interested". Ask a question? Do they like A or B better?? This provides engagement and Facebook makes those posts seen more.

#2 Reply to Comments. FB likes to see you interacting. If anyone reacts to your post, click reply and write something.

#3 Fun Pictures/Creativity is Rewarded with views. With 3.07 Billion Facebook users, posts get buried FAST. To be seen, you need to Stand OUT! FUN images do that. Be DIFFERENT.

#4 TAGS work. Get a list of people who will let you tag them. Tagging makes Facebook think you are popular and gets your posts seen. TAG, TAG, TAG! Get a tagging list together now! And start copying and pasting it every time you want eyes on a post.

#5 Start Accepting Friend Requests. If you are friends with someone, you are more likely to see their posts. (Only problem is it stops at 5000). When someone comments on a post, like that comment. Ask them to be a friend then they will see your posts more!

#6 Fast Comments. Try to get comments in the 1st hour the post is posted!!! Facebook likes when people comment right after it's posted. The 1st hour is best to make sure that happens.

#7 Posting at Peak Times will Lead to more Eyes. 8 to 9am is good. Weekdays are best.



Promoting your Business on Facebook

Tips from Aleah Arundale

#8 Videos HELP. You don't need fancy. Just turn phone around and say HI. FB likes videos! It will show it to more people.

#9 People want to do business with PEOPLE!! Show you and YOU will sell more. Facebook is about giving your company a FACE... you!!!

#10 Think Storytelling. People like stories.

#11 KEEP it simple. If I throw 3 balls at you, you won't catch any. If I throw 1 you will catch it. If your post is too long, make 2 posts! Cut! Cut! Cut! Less is more. People want easy and don't want to read much.

#12 Have a Call for Action. Call me about this post below for more info. Ask them to DO something.

#13 LOVES get more views than LIKES. Move to loving something rather than liking it.

#14 Engage Engage Engage. Did you know the more you comment on other people's posts the more your posts are seen? Because Facebook sees you as someone people want to engage with. So don't just post. Be sure to spend 15 minutes a day liking, loving, and commenting on other people's posts.

Hope this Helped!

We live in an attention economy. If you can get someone's attention you can sell them things. We need to make sure you get that attention.





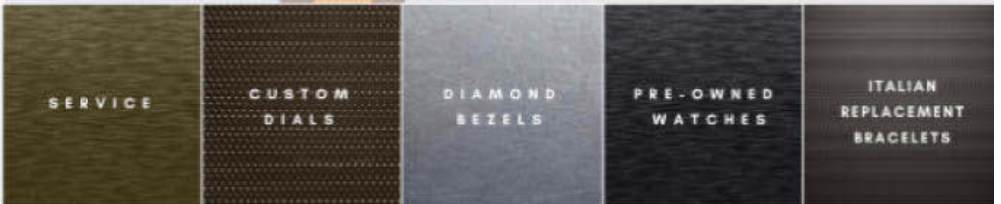
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Announcements



Jeff Koch made his final official visit to Ford, Gittings and Kane Jewelers in Rome, Georgia. The team celebrated Jeff with cupcakes and wished him well in his next chapter. Jeff's outstanding service to his clients will be greatly missed.

Jeff Koch, Bulova's longtime watch sales representative and a fixture in Georgia's jewelry industry, has announced his retirement in 2026.

Jeff, a native of Southeastern Pennsylvania, launched his career in retail watch sales where he received training as a watchmaker. He spent 13 years learning watchmaking skills before starting his role as a traveling sales rep with Wittnauer in 1998. In 2001, Bulova bought Wittnauer and Jeff Koch spent the next 23 years on the road selling watches with Bulova.

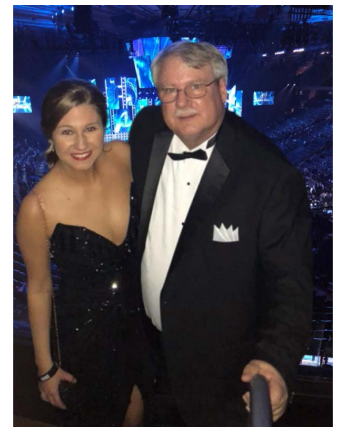
Jeff has been an active member and board member with the Georgia Jewelers Association for decades. As an Associate Board Member, he served as a convention speaker, led the Membership Committee, and generously contributed to our fundraising efforts. His support for law enforcement made a lasting impression at our 2025 convention, where he presented a deserving agent with a watch in appreciation of their service to our industry.

Over Jeff's 25-year tenure as a successful salesman he has gained a reputation with his customers for outstanding interpersonal skills. His friendly and positive outlook has made him one of the most well-liked sales reps in our region. Our retail members will miss Jeff's hospitality, support, and expertise. Fortunately, Jeff plans to stay involved with the Georgia Jewelers Association after retirement. The welcoming smile he charmed us all with will continue to welcome our members at board meetings and conventions during his retirement years.

The Georgia Jewelers Association would like to honor Jeff Koch for his service to the jewelry industry in the State of Georgia.

"Consumers buy from people they trust. Always have, always will."

~ Jeff Koch, Bulova



Announcements

Introducing the Tools in Hand Project

The Georgia Jewelers Association, in partnership with the **Geller Blue Book**, is proud to announce that it has received funding through the **Jewelers of America Impact Initiative** to promote bench jeweler careers in Georgia and across the Southeast.

The Tools in Hand project is designed to increase the number of educated, skilled, and employable bench jewelers throughout our state and region. Through this initiative, we will connect with local communities and introduce young people and job seekers to the opportunities available in the jewelry industry.

Our outreach will include:

- Visits to high schools, trade schools, and job fairs
- Informational sessions for young people interested in entering the workforce
- Hands-on presentations and demonstrations led by
- Georgia Jewelers Association members



By placing gemstones, gold, and tools directly into the hands of young people, we believe we can spark the same passion for the jewelry industry that has inspired so many of us. Tools in Hand is an investment in the future of our trade and in the next generation of bench jewelers.

For Retailers and Bench Jewelers

The most common concern we hear from our retail members is the growing need for skilled bench jewelers in retail stores across Georgia. The Tools in Hand project is designed to help address that need while strengthening the future of the jewelry industry in our state.

Georgia Jewelers Association members are invited to participate in events in their local communities. Funding will be provided to help compensate participants for their time, support their involvement, and cover supplies needed to promote bench jeweler careers.

Participating may benefit retailers by:

- Increasing visibility and involvement in their local communities
- Encouraging residents and students to explore careers in the jewelry industry
- Connecting with potential future employees during or after their education
- Helping reduce pressure on current staff by growing the pool of skilled bench workers
- Supporting faster, more timely repair service for customers

We hope the compensation provided through this program will help offset some of the financial burden our stores are enduring, including the rising costs many businesses face.

How to Participate

If you are a retail store owner or bench jeweler in Georgia and believe your store could benefit from the **Tools in Hand Project**, please can register through the Georgia Jewelers Association website in a few months or visit our GJA booth at the Atlanta Jewelry Show August 22nd-23rd, 2026. You can also email Janie Churchey at Sarahjchurchey@gmail.com. Priority will be given to Georgia Jewelers Association Member stores.

If you are not currently a member, we would be pleased to welcome you into the organization. Once you join, we encourage you to register for the program and take part in this statewide effort.

As always, the Georgia Jewelers Association is committed to supporting and serving jewelry businesses across the state. By working together, Georgia retailers can strengthen the bench jeweler workforce, reduce pressure on current staff, improve repair turnaround times, and make a lasting impact on the future of our industry.

Sponsors, Vendors and Donations

The Georgia Jewelers Association believes the Tools in Hand Project will strengthen our value to retailers while helping introduce new bench jewelers to the businesses and suppliers that support our industry.

Your advertising and sponsorship support will help ensure that your business is one of the first names new bench jewelers encounter as they enter the field. This increased visibility can build name recognition and give industry newcomers early knowledge of and access to your goods or services.

Sponsors will be recognized through:

- Inclusion on handouts and informational materials distributed to prospective employees and students
- Visibility at presentations, demonstrations, speeches, and community outreach events
- Association with a statewide effort to promote employment and strengthen the jewelry workforce

We appreciate your support and loyalty, and we would be honored to include your business as we promote careers in the jewelry industry.

Requested Materials

If you would like to support this initiative, we are seeking donated stones, tools, and equipment that can be used for demonstrations, hands-on activities, and event prizes.

Useful stone donations include:

- Breakouts, melee, broken stones, and lower-quality gemstones
- Lab-created diamonds between one-half carat and one carat
- Other stones that may no longer be usable in your regular business operations

While we do not want to place fine gemstones into the hands of young people, a small number of nicer stones may be used as prizes during speeches and events.

We are also seeking tool and equipment donations, including:

- Extra tools you no longer use
- Partially broken or inaccurate equipment
- Tweezers, loupes, burs, pliers, metals, soldering supplies, solder, safety glasses, gloves, drill bits

No donation is too small. The purpose of our organization is to accomplish together what individual businesses may not be able to achieve alone.

Please mark gemstones with identifying information and mail them to:

Tools in Hand
P.O. Box 5
Tucker, GA 30085



Thank you,

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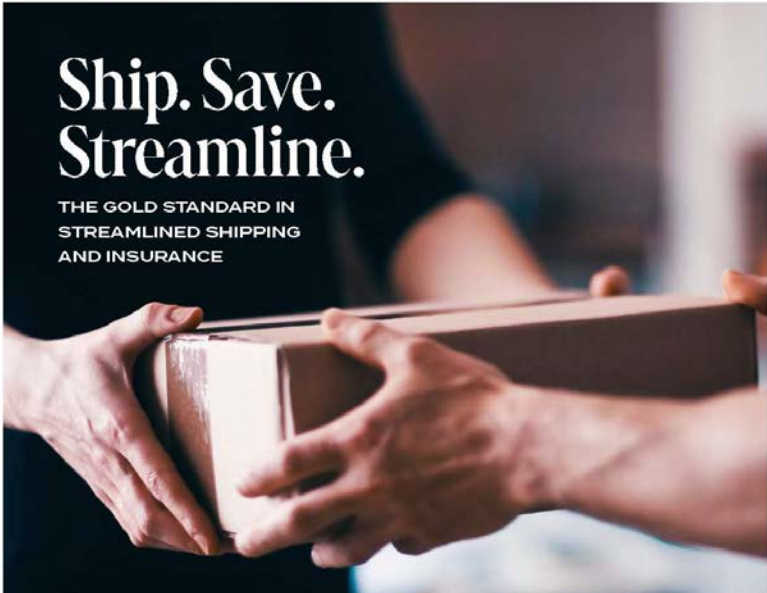
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