

# A FLOURISHING TALENT

City High student excels in art of jewelry making



Above and below: Alex Moen, 17, of Iowa City creates jewelry and chain maille at his home Tuesday. Benjamin Roberts / Iowa City Press-Citizen

Beadology owner Karen Kubby calls his work "well-constructed ... (with) quality materials."

M.C. Ginsberg Jewelers president Mark Ginsberg said he shows promise in a future of jewelry making.

And he's only 17 years old.

Alex Moen, a junior at City High, has been making his own jewelry since he was 12. He creates all kinds of bracelets, necklaces and earrings in a variety of styles, from seed beading, Viking knit, chain maille and wire work, even making his own beads.

He works with patience and precision, something Kubby said is unusual for a jewelry maker his age. Kubby has known Moen for three years as a loyal customer and volunteer.

"Our employees, who are from their late 20s to mid 30s to 50s, sometimes we say Alex is more mature than many of our friends," she said. "He is organized."

For Moen, making jewelry started as a way to escape the stresses of life. In 2006, at 12, Moen was diagnosed with a cranial meningioma, or a brain tumor. At the time, he'd been making hemp and macramé friendship bracelets at the influence of his older sister, Elaine, but it wasn't until his diagnosis that his hobby really took off.

"I couldn't do a whole lot for the first six months," he said. "After the tumor, I just exploded into making jewelry."

Moen's experience is a combination of self-teaching and attending classes at Beadology, he said. He makes about five pieces of jewelry a week and sells from a collection of about 120 pieces at local farmers markets and winter shows, including What a Load of Craft. He also has taught a chain maille class at Beadology and plans to teach more at the shop -- a privilege unusual for even a longtime jewelry maker, Kubby said.

"We're well-known for the quality of our classes. We don't just invite anyone to come in and teach. Most are employees at the store," she said. "But I asked Alex to come in and asked him to teach me (chain maille) so I could check out his tone and manners, and he was great. I was really impressed and pleased to have him as an instructor and hope to do so again.

"He is hungry to learn jewelry-making techniques," she said.

Moen currently is interning at M.C. Ginsberg as part of the FasTrac student program. He is only the second high school student to obtain an internship at the store, Ginsberg said. Moen spends one day a week at the shop polishing rings and learning the basics of jewelry-making techniques.

"We typically don't have high school interns, but if a high school kid is passionate enough or intense enough, we take them on with a desire to learn and take direction," Ginsberg said. "(Moen) definitely shows a propensity to want to learn and seems to start a project and finish it."

When Moen isn't making jewelry, he's probably on the field managing City High's wrestling and football teams, he said. When he graduates, he plans to go to college, either for medical school or jewelry making.

"I didn't know this before, but I realized how similar the two (fields) are ... (in that) every detail matters," Moen said. "(But) my parents aren't crazy about art as a career, so I might keep it as a side hobby."

Kubby said she looks forward to seeing where Moen's future takes him.

"I can't wait to see what he's like when he's 40. He's so phenomenally compassionate," she said. "We need more Alex Moens in this world."