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2026 Convention Yearbook

CONTENTS

President's Message	8	<u>Photo Collages</u>	
		• Saltwater 2025	36-37
<u>AJA Positions of Leadership</u>		• AJA 101st Convention 2025	48-49
• Executive Officers	8	<u>Save the Date - Upcoming Events</u>	
• Board of Regional Vice Presidents.....	10	• Saltwater 2026	40
• Past President's Advisory Council	10	<u>History</u>	
• Associate Members Serving on the Board of Directors.....	19	• Our Founders	45
<u>2026 Convention</u>		• Past Presidents of AJA	46
• Convention Sponsors.....	4	• AJA Administrations Over the Years.....	46
• Convention Speakers Introductions	24-25	<u>Past Convention Programs</u>	
• Schedule of Events	30-31	• 2025 Design Competition Winners	52
• Discovery Tables.....	32	• 2025 Jewelry Scholarship Winners	54
• Poker Tournament.....	50	<u>For Fun</u>	
<u>Membership</u>		• Word Scramble.....	42
• Retail Membership Roster	14-15	(Answers on pg 47)	
• Associate Membership Roster	18-19	• Word Search	57
• Past Associate Members of the Year	19	• Crossword Puzzle	58
• Lifetime Members Roster	20	(Answers on pg 54)	
• Lifetime Memeber Award	50	<u>Advertisers Index</u>	59
<u>Article</u>			
• The Power of Precious Metals.....	23		



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AJA President's Message

Welcome to the Alabama Jewelers Association Spring Convention. Every year, this weekend reminds me why the jewelry industry is so special. It is built on trust, relationships, craftsmanship, and the individuals who come to us to mark life's biggest moments. That is something worth being proud of, and it is something Alabama jewelers continue to do exceptionally well.

There is certainly no shortage of industry-wide issues affecting us right now. Gold and silver prices have kept all of us on our toes, and broader uncertainty in the global economy continues to demand attention. Whether this uncertainty impacts our businesses directly or indirectly, it is a reminder to stay informed, stay flexible, and continue cultivating the relationships we've built in our community.

At the same time, this is also a season of real opportunity. The growing capabilities of technology and AI are giving business owners tools to better adapt in uncertain times. The ability to improve our productivity, communicate and market more effectively, and brainstorm more creatively is at our fingertips. Technology will never replace trust, taste, or those ever-important relationships, but it can make us stronger if we use it wisely.

As I transition out as president and into a new role on the AJA Board, I reflect on the experience I've gained from my time served. I'm grateful for everything this chapter of life taught me, and I'm excited to take it with me to the next chapter. The jewelry industry has an incredible future ahead, and I look forward to continuing to work with this amazing community of jewelers.

Thank you for being here, for supporting this association, and for continuing to move our industry forward. I hope this weekend leaves you encouraged, better informed, and excited for what's ahead.



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Joseph Denaburg
Levy's Fine Jewelry
Birmingham, AL

Joseph Denaburg

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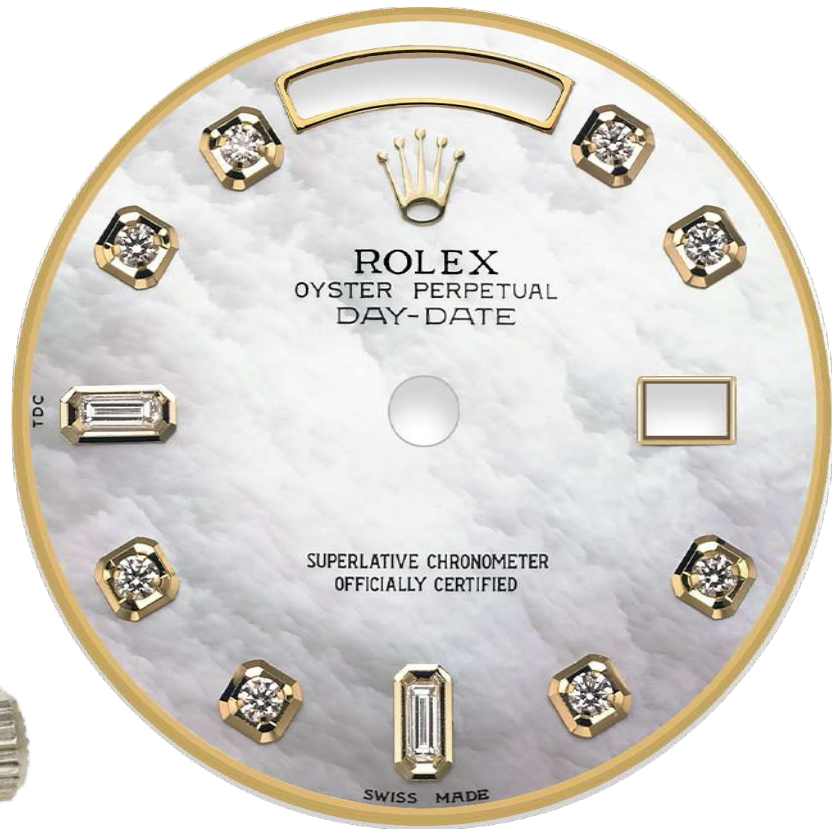
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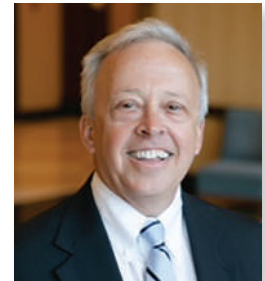
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Benefield's Jewelers
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Mr. Pete Owens*
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Mr. Preston Jones*
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Alexander City, AL

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The Power of Precious Metals: How Gold and Silver Shape the Jewelry Retail Market

Gold and silver have always been foundational to the jewelry retail market, but their influence extends far beyond aesthetics. These metals shape pricing strategies, consumer behavior, inventory decisions, and even marketing narratives within the industry. Understanding their impact helps explain both the opportunities and challenges jewelry retailers face in a fluctuating global economy.

At the most basic level, gold and silver act as benchmark commodities. Their prices are driven by global factors such as inflation, currency strength, geopolitical tension, and central bank policies. When gold prices rise sharply—as they often do during economic uncertainty—retailers are forced to adjust. Higher raw material costs translate into increased retail prices, which can slow consumer demand, particularly for higher-carat gold pieces. In response, many retailers shift their focus toward lighter-weight designs, alternative metals, or lower karat options like 10K or 14K to maintain accessible price points.

Silver plays a different but equally important role. Because it is significantly more affordable than gold, silver becomes a key driver of volume sales, especially among younger consumers and trend-focused buyers. During periods when gold prices surge, silver jewelry often sees increased demand as customers look for stylish yet budget-friendly alternatives. This positions silver as both a complementary and counter-cyclical product within the retail mix.

Consumer perception is another major factor. Gold is traditionally associated with luxury, permanence, and investment value. It dominates bridal, heirloom, and high-end fashion categories. Silver, on the other hand, is often viewed as versatile, contemporary, and accessible. Retailers leverage these perceptions in merchandising—gold for milestone purchases and emotional significance, silver for everyday wear and impulse buys. The balance between the two metals allows stores to appeal to a broader demographic.

Market volatility in gold and silver prices also influences buying behavior in a more strategic sense. Some consumers treat gold jewelry as a quasi-investment, purchasing during dips or holding onto pieces when prices rise. This behavior has fueled growth in gold-buying programs and trade-in events, where retailers recycle old jewelry into new inventory or liquidate it based on current market value. These programs not only generate revenue but also create customer engagement opportunities.

From an inventory standpoint, managing gold and silver requires careful planning. Retailers must decide when to buy, how much to stock, and how to price items in a way that protects margins while remaining competitive. Hedging strategies, supplier relationships, and manufacturing timelines all become critical when dealing with metals that can fluctuate daily. A sudden spike in gold prices can quickly erode profit margins if pricing is not adjusted in time.

Gold and silver impact branding and storytelling. Retailers frequently highlight gold's historical significance and enduring value, while silver is marketed as modern and expressive. During times of economic uncertainty, messaging around gold often leans into security and timelessness. In contrast, silver campaigns tend to emphasize fashion, fun, and accessibility.

Gold and silver are not just materials—they are economic indicators, marketing tools, and strategic levers within the jewelry retail market. Their fluctuating values influence everything from pricing and inventory to consumer psychology and design direction. Retailers who understand and adapt to these dynamics are better positioned to remain competitive, profitable, and relevant in an ever-changing marketplace.

2026 Convention Speakers



SUCCESSFULLY NAVIGATE SKY-HIGH GOLD PRICES

PRESENTED BY *Chris Ploof*

OWNER AND DESIGNER, CHRIS PLOOF DESIGNS

SATURDAY, APRIL 25 | 1:15PM

Hailing from a small town in Massachusetts award winning master jeweler Chris Ploof was once a skinny boy lurking around the local living history museum, watching awestruck as the craftspeople manipulated what had previously seemed unyielding: glass, tin, iron.

After traveling the world trying hands-on careers that spoke to his historical influences and technical skills, Chris found himself back on his boyhood path, attempting to make a forge improvised by a 55-gallon drum, some fire bricks and hairdryer. Eventually his knowledge seeking led him to jewelry making classes. At last, he was home.

Chris studied with many well-known artists and apprenticed under a master goldsmith. He has an insatiable curiosity and drive that led him down long roads even after the challenges at hand have been met.

The Santa Fe Symposium has chosen Chris twice to receive the Industry Leader Award. He has a series of instructional videos through Interweave, his work is on the cover of Showcase 500 Rings: New Directions in Art Jewelry (Lark, 2012) and in countless other publications, and he travels frequently as a consultant to the jewelry industry. His studio is in Massachusetts, where he works with a carefully chosen, fun team of like-minded talent.



HOW TO BALANCE YOUR BUSINESS

PRESENTED BY *Mariel Diaz*

FOUNDER, ACCOUNTING FOR JEWELERS

SATURDAY, APRIL 25 | 2:15PM

Mariel Diaz founded Accounting for Jewelers in 2013 to provide accounting services to jewelry businesses in the US. Mariel oversees operations and is a trusted advisor to jewelry business owners. She is a 2nd generation jeweler and was previously a GIA Graduate Gemologist, JA Certified Bench Jeweler and German-trained Gemstone Carver before she became an Accountant.



INTRODUCING THE IGI ORIGIN MACHINE

PRESENTED BY *John Pollard*

SENIOR DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION, INTERNATIONAL GEMOLOGICAL INSTITUTE

SATURDAY, APRIL 25 | 3:00PM

John Pollard is Senior Director of Education for IGI, expanding the institute's educational initiatives and diploma programs taught in eight countries around the world and designing seminars, workshops, and eLearning courses for IGI clients in all industry sectors including leading luxury brands. A career consultant for diamond producers, grading laboratories and retailers in North America, Europe, and Asia, John has lectured at JCK Las Vegas, the American Gem Society Conclave, the Gemological Institute of America Alumni Association, Jewelers of America, the Women's Jewelry Association and international expos in Beijing and Shanghai, China. He is published in Gem-A, the Journal of Gemmology. Prior to joining IGI John held management roles with companies specializing in diamond cut quality, operating in both traditional and eCommerce channels, where he educated thousands of industry professionals and consumers alike. He holds degrees in education, gemology, and music, a professional educator's certificate from the Texas state board of education, USA, and is a two-time winner of the HEB Education Foundation's Award of Excellence. John remains active in youth education advocacy on a national level as a member of the Board of Directors of Music For All, America's largest and most influential music education organization.

2026 Convention Speakers



TOP TIPS FOR MAXIMIZING YOUR SOCIAL MEDIA

PRESENTED BY *Amanda J. Gizzi*

SUNDAY, APRIL 26 | 9:30AM

SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT OF CORPORATE AFFAIRS OF JEWELERS OF AMERICA

With over 20 years of industry experience, Gizzi brings a deep passion and unwavering commitment to advancing the jewelry profession. She is a nationally recognized spokesperson who actively promotes the jewelry industry and JA members nationally.

Gizzi oversees the organization's external affairs, including strategic communications, public relations, government affairs, advocacy, industry partnerships, events, and education.

Gizzi is an authority on fine jewelry and appears regularly on television, radio and podcasts showcasing the latest trends and providing consumers with fine jewelry and watch education. She also works directly with leading editors, writers and reporters to place fine jewelry and jewelry stories on a regular basis.



THE BEST STRATEGIES TO CONNECT WITH CUSTOMERS (PANEL)

PRESENTED BY *Suzanne Adams*

SUNDAY, APRIL 26 | 10:15AM

VP, BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT OF JEWELERS MUTAL GROUP

Suzanne Adams is a seasoned expert in Jewelry and Luxury retail, with 20 years of experience in Jewelry, 25 years in Risk Management & Services, and 28 years in Client Management. This unique blend of expertise affords Suzanne with profound insights into how a partnership of these elements can significantly enhance sales and elevate the overall customer experience.

Suzanne has collaborated with the largest and most respected retailers and brands in the Jewelry industry, having won their business and their hearts while maintaining 100% client retention. Her efforts have driven cultural transformation that promote growth, drive revenue, and redefine best-in-class industry standards. This has been accomplished through curating strategies tailored to each retailer's needs while remaining attuned to an ever-evolving retail landscape.

Suzanne lives in Atlanta, GA. She is a lifelong learner, avid fitness enthusiast, worldwide adventurer, and Eurovision superfan who possesses a great love of anything feline. Suzanne serves on the Board of Jewelers for Children and is a proxy Board member for Diamonds Do Good, fundraising for both organizations. Causes near and dear to Suzanne's heart include literacy, domestic violence, ALZ/dementia, and LGBTQ+.



HOW TO LEVERAGE THE LATEST JEWELRY TRENDS FOR YOUR BUSINESS

PRESENTED BY *Natalie Francisco*

SUNDAY, APRIL 26 | 11:15AM

ASSOCIATE EDITOR, NATIONAL JEWELER

Natalie Francisco is the associate editor, fashion at National Jeweler. She covers designers, trends, and new collections in daily digital articles and for the publication's biannual printed issues, State of the Majors and Retailer Hall of Fame. She regularly writes National Jeweler's "Piece of the Week" article, which highlights an exceptional piece of jewelry each week. Natalie attends trade shows and other industry events to discover emerging trends and connect with up-and-coming designers

and established brands. She also covers red carpet fashion and celebrity engagements to highlight jewels worn by the stars. She has been a judge for Jewelers of America's CASE Awards, a panelist for a JCK Talks session, co-hosted multiple episodes for the "My Next Question" webinar series, and joined as a guest on Jewelers of America and National Jeweler's new "My Next Question" podcast. Prior to joining the fine jewelry trade magazine in 2024, she held content writer positions for interior design, gardening, women's lifestyle, and music publications.

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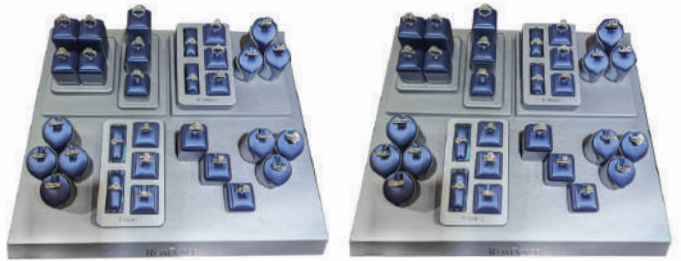
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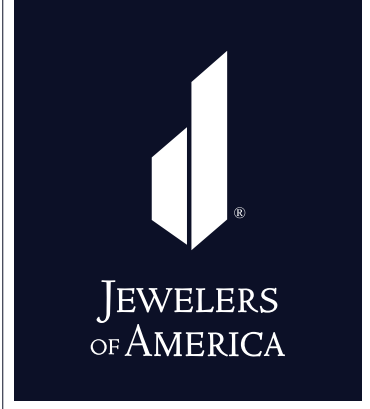


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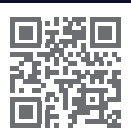
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Alabama Jewelers Association Convention

Featuring Jewelers of America Learning Workshop

April 24-26

Hyatt Regency Birmingham – Wynfrey Hotel – Birmingham, AL

Friday, April 24, 2026

5:00-10:00PM **Hospitality Suite**.....Presidential Suite #1523
Pick up your informational packets, eat, drink, and get to know your fellow jewelers! 15th Floor

Saturday, April 25, 2026

12:30-1:00PM **Registration/Check-in**.....Wynfrey Ballroom A, B, C

1:00PM-1:15PM **Welcome** Wynfrey Ballroom A, B, C
Alabama Jewelers and Jewelers of America Learning Workshop

1:15-2:00PM **Successfully Navigate Sky-High Gold Prices**Wynfrey Ballroom A, B, C
Presented by Chris Ploof, TK, Chris Ploof Designs - With gold prices hitting new records on an almost daily basis and analysts predicting it could soon exceed \$5,000, jewelers have had to double down on innovative design, craftsmanship and emphasizing the strong value proposition for gold jewelry. This session will cover top strategies for managing both customer expectations and your business in this volatile market.

2:00-2:15PM **Networking Break**.....Wynfrey Ballroom A, B, C

2:15-3:00PM **How to Balance Your Business**.....Wynfrey Ballroom A, B, C
Presented by Mariel Diaz, TK, Accounting for Jewelers - Having sound and consistent accounting best practices in place is more important than ever today, as the challenge of successfully running your business hits the headwinds of an increasingly volatile market. This session offers ideas for better managing everything from costs and inventory to tax compliance.

3:00-3:15PM **Introducing the IGI Origin Machine**..... Wynfrey Ballroom A, B, C
John Pollard Senior Director of Education International Gemological Institute - After years of research and development, IGI is introducing the ORGIN machine; a jewelry-store-grade instrument which clearly separate natural, CVD, and HPHT diamonds and simulants, loose or mounted, without requiring human interpretation. With diamond screening a major ongoing challenge for retailers, IGI will provide a brief demonstration and answer questions about this new solution to one of the industry's most pressing challenges.

5:00-6:15PM **Hospitality Suite**.....Presidential Suite #1523
15th Floor

6:30-7:00PM **President's Cocktail Reception**.....Wynfrey Ballroom D, E

7:00-8:30PM **Dinner**.....Wynfrey Ballroom D, E

8:30-10:00PM **Hospitality Suite/Gene Callaway Poker Tournament/Bingo**.....Presidential Suite #1523
Benefiting Jewelers for Children 15th Floor



Alabama Jewelers Association Convention

Featuring Jewelers of America Learning Workshop

April 24-26

Hyatt Regency Birmingham – Wynfrey Hotel – Birmingham, AL

Sunday, April 26, 2026

8:00-9:00AM	Continental BreakfastWynfrey Ballroom A, B, C <i>Breakfast Sandwiches, Muffins, Danishes, Coffee, Assorted Beverages</i>
8:00-8:30AM	Discovery Tables and Jewelry Design Set-upWynfrey Ballroom A, B, C
8:30AM-3:00PM	Discovery Tables OpenWynfrey Ballroom A, B, C
9:00-9:30AM	Welcome & “State of the Industry” PresentationWynfrey Ballroom A, B, C <i>Provided by Jewelers of America - The presentation will also include a walk-through of the top benefits offered by JA.</i>
9:30-10:15AM	Top Tips for Maximizing Your Social MediaWynfrey Ballroom A, B, C <i>Presented by Amanda Gizzi, Senior Vice President of Corporate Affairs for Jewelers of America - An effective social media strategy can be a powerful tool to expand your reach, connect with customers (both new and existing) and strengthen brand identity. But the path to authentic connections that grow your business is full of pitfalls to avoid. In this session you will get actionable insights on how to successfully engage with customers across social media platforms and avoid common mistakes.</i>
10:15-11:00AM	The Best Strategies to Connect with Customers (Panel)Wynfrey Ballroom A, B, C <i>Retail panel discussion moderated by Suzanne Adams, VP Business Development of Jewelers Mutual – This session will look at some of the keyways to build trust, relationships and lasting loyalty with your customers. This will be retail panel discussion moderated by Jewelers of America</i>
11:00-11:15AM	Networking/Discovery Table Break
11:15-12:00AM	How to Leverage the Latest Jewelry Trends for Your Business.. Wynfrey Ballroom A, B, C <i>Presented by Natalie Fransico, Assistant Editor at National Jeweler and Amanda Gizzi, Senior Vice President of Corporate Affairs for Jewelers of America - This session will delve into the latest jewelry trends captivating consumers – from Red Carpets and Runways to Main Street-- and how your business can effectively incorporate them into your collections, marketing strategies and sales tactics. Learn how to harness the power of current style trends to drive both engagement and sales—for short and long-term gains.</i>
12:00-2:00PM	Past President’s Luncheon, Awards and Design ContestWynfrey Ballroom D, E
2:00-3:00PM	Discovery TablesWynfrey Ballroom A, B, C
3:00PM	AJA Board Member MeetingWynfrey Ballroom A, B, C

**IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS OR WOULD LIKE MORE INFORMATION:
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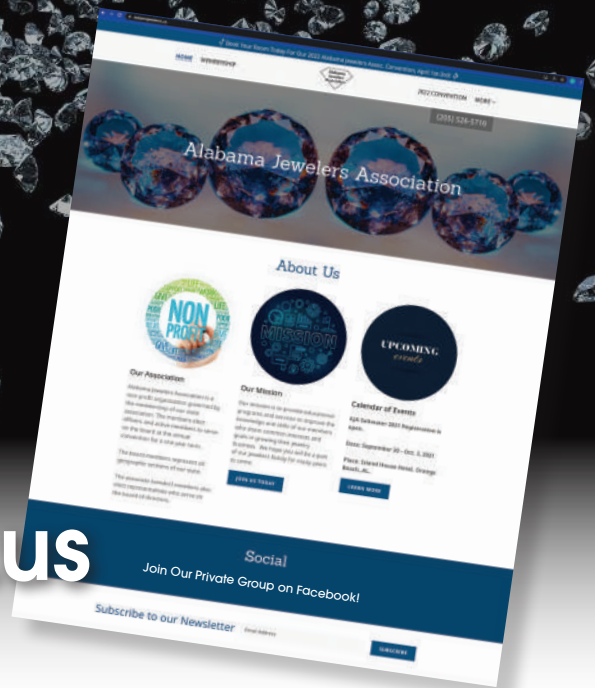
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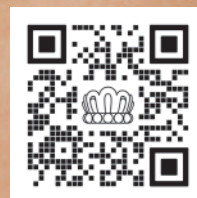
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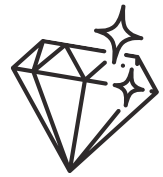
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**The data presented is taken from a specific case study and reflects individual outcomes. Actual results may differ depending on a variety of factors.*

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1920 — *The First Annual Convention*

FIRST ALABAMA CONVENTION - Shown in front of Birmingham's Morris Hotel in 1920 are (Left to Right): J. C. Mickleboro, Marion; Aaron Ash, Birmingham; Frank Lynch, Birmingham; Henry Hausman, New Orleans; E. M. Dorian, Anniston; Reid Lawson, Birmingham; O. L. Bunn, Birmingham; and the representative of the American Retail Jewelers Assn. (name unknown)



1948 — *The First Modern-Day Convention*

ASSOCIATION REORGANIZED - The Thomas Jefferson Hotel in Birmingham was the scene of the 1948 convention that saw the association reorganized. Left to Right, Front: Aaron Ash, Birmingham; Robert Bromberg, Birmingham, President; Alex Fekula, Mobile, Vice President. Back: Garfield Goodwin, Bessemer, Secretary - Treasurer; Ben Ash, Birmingham; Terry Born of SJTA; and Raymond Hoffman, Gasden, Vice President.



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Jim Ingram*
1984-1986

Hoyt Young*
1983-1984

Tom Peoples
1981-1983

Gene Poole
1979-1981

Keith Byrd*
1977-1979

Ray Thomas*
1976-1977

Jimmy Smith*
1975-1976

David Ginn*
1974-1975

Joe Duck*
1973-1974

Roger Butler*
1972-1973

Paul Moore*
1971-1972

Charles Ray Martin*
1970-1971

Russell Benefield*
1969-1970

Elton Johnson*
1968-1969

Paul Vining*
1967-1968

Ferrell D. Mason*
1966-1967

James L. Hasty*
1965-1966

Frank Bromberg, Jr.*
1964-1965

William Spidle*
1963-1964

Lamar Ware*
1962-1963

Dwight Raff*
1961-1962

Pinky Koss*
1959-1961

Kalman Shwarts*
1958-1959

Claude Moore*
1957-1958

J.L. Hoffman*
1956-1957

Jim Pitts*
1955-1956

Garfield Goodwin*
1953-1955

Raymond Hipp*
1952-1953

William N. Neville*
1951-1952

Ben Ash*
1950-1951

Raymond Hoffman*
1949-1950

Robert Bromberg*
1947-1949

**Deceased*

A Few AJA Administrations Over the Years



1958-1959 OFFICERS

(Left to Right): Pinky Koss, Vice President; Fred Couch, Vice President; Kalman Shwarts, President; Lamar Ware, Secretary; and Dwight Raff, Treasurer.



PASSING THE GAVEL

Ferrell Mason, President (1966-1967) turning over the gavel to Paul Vining, President (1967-1968).



1974-1975 OFFICERS

David Ginn, President; Mr. Smith, 1st Vice-President; Mr. Thomas, 2nd Vice-President; Joe Campbell, Secretary.

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EYTSMATH	AMETHYST
OETNOMSON	MOONSTONE
EEMRALD	EMERALD
PEIHSRAP	SAPPHIRE
ESUQTUIRO	TURQUOISE
OLRTIUFE	FLUORITE
IRTONELAMU	TOURMALINE
TNNZTAEIA	TANZANITE
TINEYAK	KYANITE
NORATMGIE	MORGANITE
ODTOIRHLE	RHODOLITE
TMILOEMA	AMMOLITE
LOESTBOODN	BLOODSTONE
COSAOCLHLRY	CHRYSOCOLLA
ABDEAROLITR	LABRADORITE
BIIAONSD	OBSIDIAN
RENAEIMT	AMETRINE
MTIUENMU	NIUMMITE
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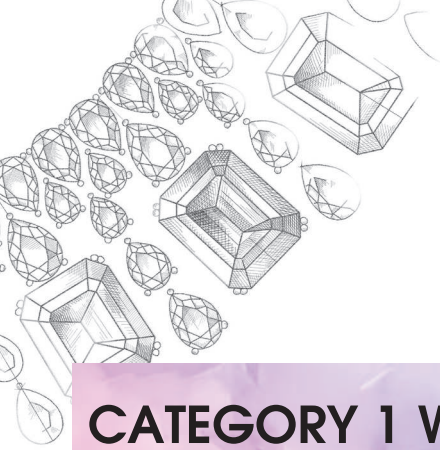
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2025

AGA Design Competition



CATEGORY 1 WINNER

Steve Sherrer
Lou's Jewelry
Mobile, AL

*Yellow gold
Blue Topaz Pendant*



CATEGORY 2 WINNER

Steve Sherrer
Lou's Jewelry
Mobile, AL

*14k yellow gold
diamond McAleer's
logo pendant*



o Category 1: Materials cost \$1,000 & Under

o Category 2: Materials cost between \$1,001 & \$3,000

CATEGORY 3 WINNER AND PEOPLE'S CHOICE

Ryan Snuggs
Michael Ryan
Personal Jeweler
Birmingham, AL

*Platinum & 18k yellow
gold Yellow Sapp
Pendant*



o Category 3: Materials cost \$3,001 & Over

Alabama Jewelers Association

Alabama Jewelers Association

**Executive Director
Nancy Dawkins**

2802 Lurleen B Wallace Blvd.
Northport, Alabama 35476
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Alabama Jewelers Association Scholarship Program



The 2025 Winners were...



Rebecca Sampson
Hobbs Jewelers
Athens, AL



Matthew John Davis
Levy's Fine Jewelry
Birmingham, AL

At last year's convention, the AJA awarded two (2) scholarships in the amount of \$500 each, to two AJA members for their continuing education in the jewelry industry.

The winners were Rebecca Sampson of Hobbs Jewelers, Athens, AL and Matthew John Davis of Levy's Fine Jewelry, Birmingham, AL.

Congratulations!

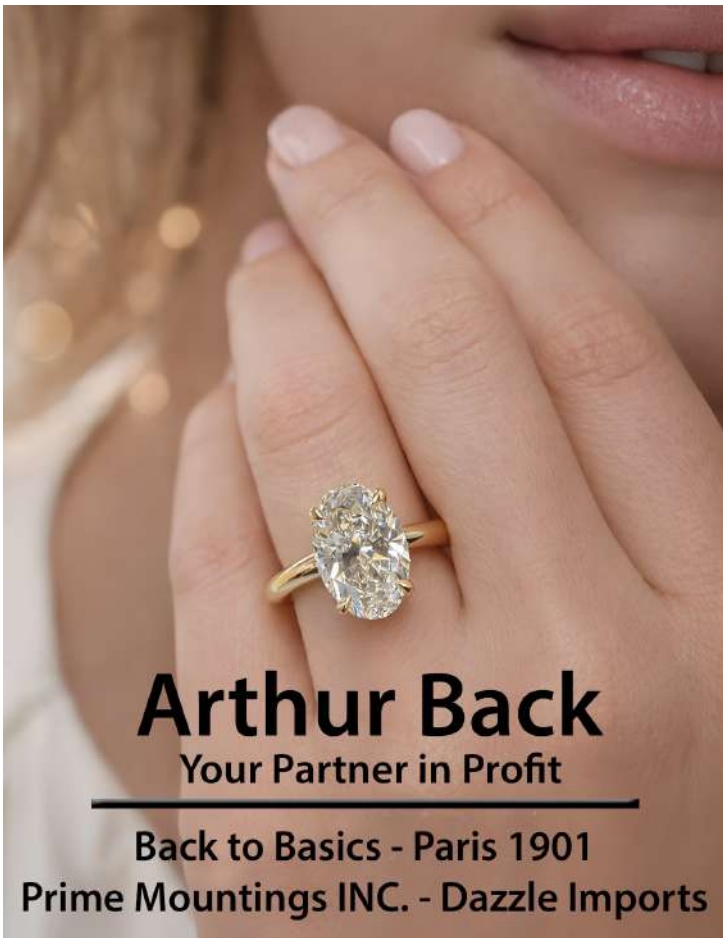
ANSWERS

1 P E N D A N T																		
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4 D			5 C	U	F	F	L	I	N	K	S							
I			K							L	6 G							
7 B	A	N	G	L	E	8 C	V			9 P	E	A	R	L				
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*CROSSWORD
PUZZLE
ON PAGE 58.*

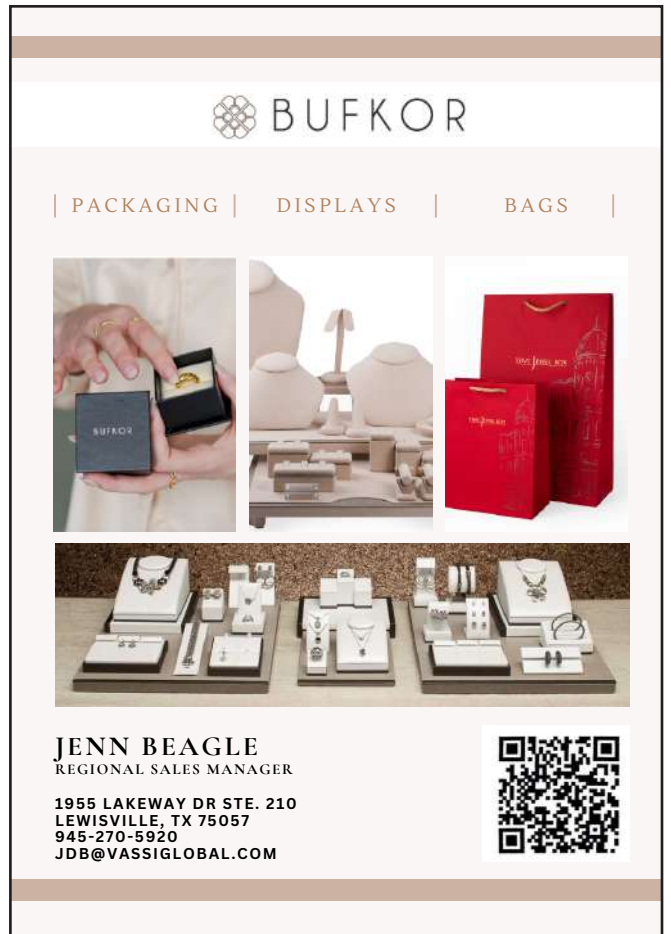
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By Rebecca

Rebecca Shemwell
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WORD SEARCH

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 G H A H B S M F S V J H P R B U W A B E S B N O T Y C D F Y
 U Z T Z L Q Q R M Z R X U R O V L S B K F E T I M C G H U Z
 T F P O L I S H Z S J N H C Y C B M P O P V M B S V L H C M
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 G Z L H V U W R V U N T D X D B R M N I W B M N P J Y Q K P
 A G Q A Z V A I K G F R J X A X U U E F M L B T K E N R Z E
 J N Y Q S C T N S T X L D B J D B U E D S E K N T X Y P Z B
 T W C J I P J G R R S S N O Y P Y N E C K L A C E L F V J M
 N F Z S W N W S X S G E N G R A V I N G W M B K V L K P A B

Cufflinks

Brilliant

Engraving

Alloy

Hallmarks

Bracelet

Necklace

Gold

Earrings

Sapphire

Gemstone

Cut

Cabochon

Milgrain

Sterling

Ring

Pendant

Diamond

Emerald

Carat

Vermeil

Platinum

Setting

Prong

Clarity

Antique

Silver

Ruby

Polish

Patina

Brooch

Watch

Facet

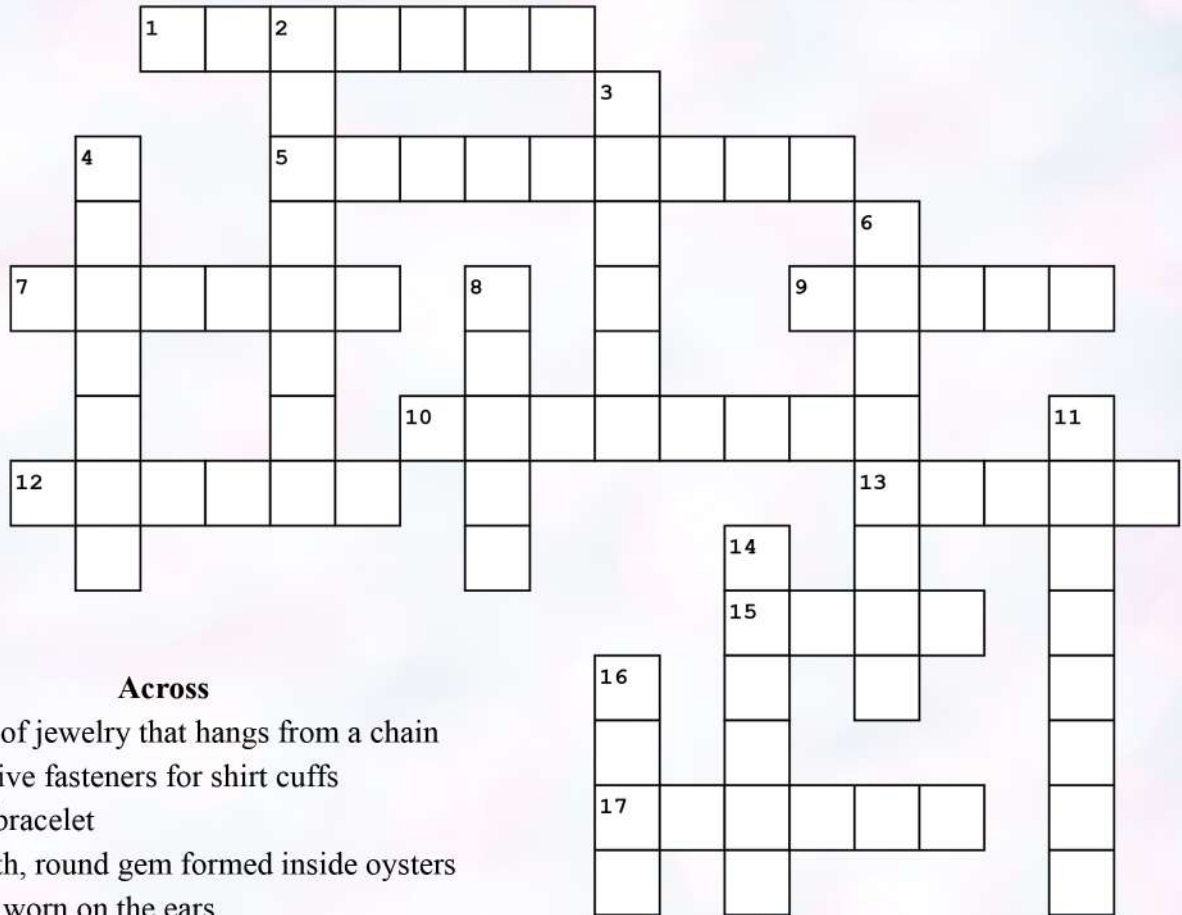
Table

Karat

Clasp

Bezel

AJA Jewelry Crossword



Across

1. A piece of jewelry that hangs from a chain
5. Decorative fasteners for shirt cuffs
7. A rigid bracelet
9. A smooth, round gem formed inside oysters
10. Jewelry worn on the ears
12. A piece of jewelry worn around the ankle
13. A small crown worn as a piece of jewelry
15. A circular band worn on the finger
17. A small pendant that opens to reveal a picture

Down

2. A piece of jewelry worn around the neck
3. A precious grayish-white metal used in jewelry
4. A precious stone known for its hardness and brilliance
6. A precious or semi-precious stone used in jewelry
8. A small decorative object worn on a bracelet
11. A piece of jewelry worn around the wrist
14. A decorative pin worn on clothing
16. A valuable yellow metal often used in jewelry





2026 ADVERTISERS INDEX

AIDEN JEWELRY.....	44	KEEP ME CONNECTED.....	39
AIYA DESIGNS/LUSTOR.....	56	KIM INTERNATIONAL.....	28
ALLISON-KAUFMAN	27	LAFONN.....	13
AMERICAN RING SOURCE	6	LEVY'S FINE JEWELRY	3
ARTHUR BACK	55	MIDWEST CLOSEOUTS.....	53
ASHI.....	43	NAMANO/SOUTHEASTERN FINDINGS	44
ATLANTA JEWELRY SHOW.....	26	NATIONAL RARITIES.....	60
BENCHMARK	12	OVERNIGHT MOUNTINGS.....	IFC
BUFKOR.....	55	PICKENS, INC.....	43
CARPENTER DIAMOND DISTRIBUTORS, INC.....	55	PREMIUM WHOLESALE,LLC	7
CHARLES FREY & COMPANY	53	RAYMOND MAZZA	42
COSTAR IMPORTS.....	35	SELECT JEWELRY SHOW	5
DARLING IMPORTS.....	42	SIMPLEX DIAM INC.....	41
EVERLEE	47	SPEEDWIRE.....	43
FANA JEWELRY/GENUINE GEMS.....	38	STAR GEMS, INC	56
GEORGIA CARBON DIAMONDS	41	THE EDGE.....	16
GLOBAL LIQUIDATORS.....	1	TIME DELAY CORP	9
HERRA MOTI	54	TRACY PEARLS.....	56
IMPERIAL PEARL	21	UNEEK	IBC
INTERCONTINENTAL DIAMONDS.....	17	UNITED PRECIOUS METAL REFINING	11
INOX MEN'S JEWELRY.....	41	VAHAN.....	33
JEWELERS FOR CHILDREN	34	VICTOR/OSTBYE	44
JEWELERS MUTUAL.....	BACK COVER	VIRGO STAR, INC	56
JEWELERS OF AMERICA	29	VLORA JEWELRY	51
JCK/JIS.....	51	WILKERSON.....	22
JUDY CARTER & ASSOCIATES.....	47		



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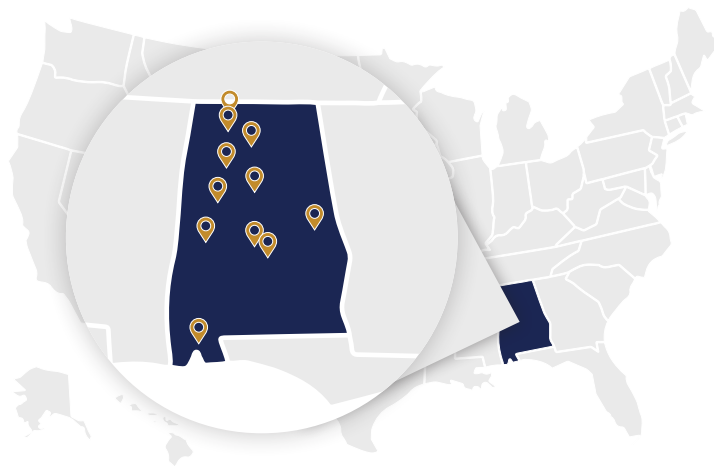


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