

Tucked away behind various trees on Shafer Street sits a colorful building with an eye-catching pink and blue sign. Upon first glance, Beads and Things may look like an ordinary bead shop. However, inside, you will be immersed in a world of color and creativity.

Founded in May 1990, Beads and Things started as a dream yet to come to life. Ohio University grad Joe Merkle opened the store with \$400 cash and a few supplies.

“My mom got me into beading when I was a kid, and I have always loved beads, so I collected them. I needed a job after college and had to provide my own opportunity,” Merkle said.

Merkle knew she loved the sales industry, but she wanted to follow her passion for bead-making. Conveniently after she left college and searched for a new job, Phil Berry came to Athens to help his cousin build a house. Although he wasn’t interested in bead-making at first, Joe was able to influence him, and together they created Beads and Things.

Even though brick-and-mortar stores have declined, the few remaining provide customers with a different experience than regular stores. Beads and Things was founded on a passion, and every decoration and piece of merchandise incorporated into it has a backstory.

“This is a very tactile business, colors that need to be seen and stories that need to be told. We source all our beads from our travels and just different artists,” Merkle says.

Very few businesses enable customers to take a break from reality. In the digital age, it can be hard to incorporate mindfulness into your day. Beads and Things is a hidden gem that allows people to put their creativity into a product.

“There’s something innate about wanting to make things representative of something. It takes you somewhere that’s good. We must go through the whole creative process with our minds. It flows over into everything else we do,” Berry says.

From the beginning, Beads and Things has been a free-flowing business. There has never been a set objective or goal; Berry and Merkle just want people to have a good time. Even though they made it clear that they’ve never really been into having a mission statement, the takeaway from this local brick-and-mortar is that, like the creative process, everything falls together eventually.

When meeting Berry and Merkle, it is evident that they strive to live their lives to the fullest. They believe that life is too short not to be lived, so everyone should go out into the world and explore what it has to offer.

“You’ll be somewhere you’ve never been before, and things will just unfold. You’ll find connections, people, and artists. The more you get out, the wider your view will be,” Berry says.

Beads and Things isn't just a store; it's a giant bead box that brings people together.

"Meeting people has been the best thing about this. Getting to be a small part of people's lives one way or another," Berry says.

There has been a divide among people over the past couple of years. Whether it be politics, religion, or even racial injustice, one could say that there has been a lot of tension within the world. Berry emphasized that throughout all his travels and adventures to various countries, he realized that many of us are a lot more alike than we think. Traveling has the ability to widen your perception of life and experience different cultures and people.

"Traveling stretches time. You make friends from different places. It's important for me to leave the country so I don't get caught up in thinking everyone thinks like me," Merkle says.

Whether you are an Athens local or an Ohio University student, I encourage you to stop into Beads and Things and experience what it offers. Not only will you leave with unique, handmade jewelry pieces, you'll leave with a different outlook on life.