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Bucks County “Diamond Detective” Celebrates Gem Lab’s 20th Anniversary

February 8, 2008, Langhorne, PA — Twenty years ago, David Craig Rotenberg, owner of David Craig Jewelers in the Summit Square Shopping Center in Langhorne, was one of the first jewelers in Bucks County – indeed in the entire state – to open an American Gem Society-accredited Gem Lab on-site at his retail location. Today, the Certified Gemologist Appraiser remains one of the few retail jewelers nationwide to operate such a lab.

“It’s a significant investment, not only monetarily, but also in a jeweler’s professional education,” says Rotenberg, who has earned multiple gemological certifications with the American Gem Society (AGS). “Three things are needed: you must be a Certified Gemologist; own AGS-certified gem lab equipment; and invest in AGS and Gemological Institute of America-certified benchmark diamonds, also known as ‘comparison’ diamonds. If I had to place a value on my gem lab today, it would likely topple \$100,000.”

Donned with a gemologist’s headlamp, Rotenberg resembles a scientist when he performs appraisal or gemological identification work in his lab. The process typically begins with taking a highly magnified photo of the gem or diamond so customers have a record of the jewelry they leave behind for appraisal. Depending on the nature of the appraisal, he employs a variety of his lab equipment to forensically analyze the piece: a cut analysis machine to measure cut performance; cut mapping machine to analyze a diamond’s angle and proportions; refractometer to measure the speed of light in gemstones; lighting device to examine a diamond’s color; ultraviolet case to help identify synthetic gems; electronic scales for accurate gemological weight; and even a Geiger counter to test for radioactivity in certain gems.

According to Rotenberg, appraisals conducted in a gem lab are almost “100% more accurate” than those offered elsewhere. He attributes this to the ‘benchmark’ diamonds used in gem labs, which represent the most perfect diamond specimen against which all others are measured. “Since I purchased them 20 years ago, the benchmark diamonds I own are very rare,” he said. “They are first generation diamonds, meaning they are certified to the mother diamond. Many other gem

labs today use 4th or 5th generation benchmark diamonds, which are still very good but not as perfect.”

Rotenberg says people have jewelry appraised for a variety of reasons, including fair market value, the item’s value in another year or era, probate concerns, IRS considerations and more. In addition to appraising jewelry for customers, Rotenberg is frequently sought by banks or law firms as well as U.S. Customs and other agencies to value items involved in financial matters. He gained national recognition for the integrity of his appraisals a few years back when he appeared on the “Primetime Live With Diane Sawyer” program as an expert appraiser in a segment focused on exposing fraudulent jewelers

Rotenberg believes his gem lab is demonstrative of his commitment to selling the highest quality jewelry at the greatest value and even tests the product his vendors sell him to ensure he is getting the quality promised. “My customers leave knowing everything there is to know about the ring or bracelet they bought,” he says. “The same goes for my appraisals – you can get a cheaper appraisal somewhere else, but if the value isn’t properly established, you just wasted your money.”

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