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What women want

Owners of **Jule** accessories store at Polaris think they know and are adding stores in Toledo, Dayton this year

By Jeffrey Sheban

THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH

Several former Limited Brands officials hope to string a few **Jules** into a chain of costume-jewelry stores. The founders of **Jule**, a year-old women's accessories business at Polaris Fashion Place, are opening stores in Toledo today and Dayton by Thanksgiving.

It's all part of a plan to build a specialty-store chain of 300 to 500 boutiques in a market segment traditionally dominated by department stores and teen shops.

"For most retailers, accessories are a secondary thought," said Renee Ongaro, chief merchant and a co-founder. "What we have done is make this a big deal."

The first **Jule** opened in November at Polaris. The 2,000-square-foot store sells costume and designer jewelry, handbags, belts, gloves, watches and sunglasses. The target market is women ages 25 to 45. Prices are considered moderate, ranging from \$10 bracelets and earrings to \$800 designer handbags.

The store is intimate in the style of a boudoir, with lots of mirrors for matching accessories to outfits, and warm, soft lighting. Wood floors and furniture help complete the relaxed mood.

Trained fashion consultants help customers accent their outfits with the latest accessories and styles.

It's a far cry from the self-service, harsh lighting and cramped quarters of Claire's, the nation's top accessories chain with 3,000 stores worldwide. But Claire's doesn't cater to adults; it markets to teen and pre-teen girls.

Women's accessories represent a large and growing market, with 2005 sales of \$30 billion. Department

stores command the greatest share of sales. The top three categories are costume jewelry, handbags and hosiery, according to Accessories, the industry's largest trade publication.

"Accessories have been on the upswing for at least the last five years and are certainly hotter than apparel," said the magazine's editor in chief, Irenka Jakubiak.

Accessories are a great way for women who can't afford designer clothing to purchase some designer items, especially handbags and sunglasses, she said.

"Women who are into fashion will know who is carrying a Coach or a Prada or a Gucci (bag)," she said. "It's a real status symbol."

Jule was the brainchild of Toledo-native Doug

Zaper, 40, who spent 15 years working with Disney and Limited Brands, and was a retail consultant with the former Management Horizons in Columbus and California.

The store is named for his youngest child, Julie.

At Disney, Zaper oversaw planning and allocation for merchandise at Disneyland; at Limited, he was in charge of bras and panties for Victoria's Secret; and inventory and planning for accessories at Limited Stores.

"The Disney experience taught me you need to create an experience so that there's an emotional attachment between the customer and store," Zaper said.

Starbucks calls it a third space, in addition to work and home, where customers can feel comfortable and relaxed, he said. **Jule** attempts to create a similar cozy environment for its shoppers.

Zaper, who lives in New Albany, used personal savings and a Small Business Administration loan to bankroll the first store. Asset Strategies Group of Westerville helped find the location, and WD Partners of Dublin drew up building plans for the store.

Ongaro, with 15 years of merchandising experience at Limited Brands, and several others helped refine the concept. Some partners offered their services as a sideline to regular jobs or in exchange for part ownership.

"At Disney or Abercrombie or Limited, they put a team of seven or so people together to bring a store concept to life," Zaper said. "I have a virtual team of professionals who have built thousands of stores between them."

Funding for up to 10 stores in markets close to Columbus will come from private investors, he said. That's when they'll see whether **Jule** has legs, Zaper said.

Jakubiak thinks the concept has potential. She said there's a need for an accessories store catering to women who want to make a single stop, who might need help with fashion and are put off by the lack of knowledgeable salespeople elsewhere.

"It's about time that kind of store existed," she said.

jsheban@dispatch.com

PHOTO

(1) Doug Zaper

(2) ADAM CAIRNS | DISPATCH PHOTOS - During Saturday afternoon shopping at Polaris Fashion Place, Nicole Wily, left, and her daughter Lindsay Ta'Ele get some assistance from **Jule's** lead stylist, Melissa Corson.

(3) According to Corson, items in blacks, reds and plaids are popular at the boutique.

Jule's cast

The people behind **Jule**:

- * Doug Zaper, founder and CEO; former Disney, Limited Brands and Management Horizons executive
 - * Renee Ongaro, merchandising; former Limited Brands merchant
 - * AnneMarie Blaire, brand and Web development; former Limited Brands employee
 - * Ken Hewes, strategy; retail consultant and former Limited Brands vice president
 - * Debbie Urton, designer and architect; Asset Strategies Group of Westerville and former Limited Brands vice president
 - * Steve Morris, real estate and strategy; Asset Strategies Group partner and former Limited Brands executive
 - * Jenn Bajec, graphic designer; owns Double NN Studio in Dublin
 - * Alex Wong, information technology; owns LaserSmith in Columbus
 - * Marx Lomoro, operations, full-time employee
- Source: **Jule**

