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Nate Wagner/DN

A QUARTET of affordable and popular wedding bands are available at Sartor Hamann, 1150 O St.

## Search for perfect ring can be tough

By Samuel McKewon

Senior editor

Sartor Hamann General Manager Bob Fixter has seen "the look" — that glazed-over stare on the faces of husbands-to-be about to fork over a couple thousand dollars for an engagement or wedding ring.

"It kind of says, 'I don't want to be here, I don't know what I'm doing here, I just want to get out of here ... please help me,'" Fixter said.

Help is just what Fixter and hundreds of other sales representatives throughout the jewelry community want to provide, he said.

Because most of Sartor Hamann's business comes through the sale of diamond rings for weddings, helping to find the right ring for the right price, while still making the bride happy, is important for the store, which has two locations in Lincoln, at 1150 O St. and the Gateway Mall.

And often, if the customer is satisfied with the ring, it establishes a lasting relationship with the store, said Sandy O'Neal, sales associate of the Omaha-based Borsheim's jewelry store, 120 Regency Parkway in Regency Court.

"The customers buying engagement rings always get the most attention," O'Neal said of service at Borsheim's, which is owned by tycoon Warren Buffett. "The engagement ring is usually the first major piece of jewelry people buy."

Buying the ring can be quick and painless or a drawn-out affair, O'Neal said, based on the "buyer personality." Some of them have done their homework and shop around vigorously; others know little more than the ring is supposed to be round and gold.

It's typically these people, Sartor

Hamann's Fixter said, that overspend for a ring.

People in Nebraska, he said, are usually more sensible than those in other states — Fixter said the Sartor Hamann store in Fort Collins, Colo., has problems with buyer credit nearly 50 percent of the time — but that many college students leap before looking.

"Nebraskans are a little wiser with their money," Fixter said. "But you always want to stay within your budget. You've got to spend what you can."

Inside the store, the process of determining the right diamond has become much more exact, with gem charts and computers to pin down the precise costs of different cuts, weights and sizes.

Prices at many stores start at \$150, and go into the thousands. The low end at Borsheim's, O'Neal said, is about \$500, with the high end without limit.


"We're seeing a lot of couples waiting to get married — not so many high schoolers as there used to be," O'Neal said. "So they have a little bit more money to spend."

There is, of course, a flip side of the engagement coin — she might say no. Or the marriage might fail. In that case, it's good to have a backup plan.

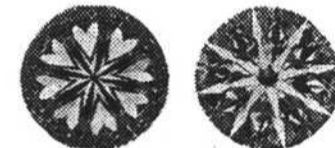
Most jewelry stores offer a 30-day return policy. But some bad relationships age over time. So stores work on a credit basis, refunding some or all of what hasn't been paid on the ring.

While all three stores, and every store out there, want the business of the prospective ring-buyers, they all suggest shopping around.

"People want the best deal, and to do that you have to know the competition," O'Neal said. "Our hope is that they'll end up here, but they need to find the best deal for them."



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