

# Houston Jewelry and Honey Donsky



The three generations of the Donsky family, Keith Solomon, Andrew Solomon, Honey Donsky and Rex Solomon.

By MIKE HAIKIN

As you drive down Westheimer near the busy intersection of Gessner, the oval-shaped sign in a sunburst setting rising out of the sky hits you like a ton of bricks.

The sign simply reads "Houston Jewelry and Distributing Company" and is augmented by a beautiful 81,000 square foot building with brown flagstone exterior on a 4 1/2-acre site.

You would think it was a grand opening the way the exterior is so neat and sparkling, but it has been 16 years since Abe (Honey) Donsky launched his second and flagship location at Westheimer and Gessner, while keeping a smaller showroom downtown, now located at Fannin and Clay.

You walk inside this incredible Westheimer store, run by son-in-law Andrew Solomon, and the wide variety of merchandise, ranging from fine jewelry to chil-

dren's toys amid hundreds of counters, is enough to boggle your mind. The famous brand names pop up at you like the proverbial sunburst - Rolex, Movado, Seiko, David Yurman, Lagos Baccarat, LaLique, Lladro (largest selection in the city), Waterford, Orrefors, Monte Blanc, Nikon, Leica, Vuarnet, Carrera, Chloe, Reed & Barton, Lunt, Royal Worcester, Johnson Brothers, Mikasa and on and on.

There's exercise equipment, sporting goods, cameras, (the camera dept. sells more Canon cameras than any camera store in Texas), designer sunglasses, baby furniture, luggage, office supplies, perfumes, sundry drugs, toys, stereos, televisions, video recorders, phones, answering machines, fax machines, and barbecue grills - you want it, Houston Jewelry has it . . . and all discounted at prices far below what shoppers would find at other fine department stores.

Honey Donsky is particularly proud of his fine jewelry and of his custom jewelry manufacturing facilities, one of the largest in the Southwest, which have always attracted an international, as well as local clientele . . . George and Barbara Bush (regulars before they went to Washington), royalty, movie stars, top business executives, lawyers, doctors and other professionals. Two years ago, when Honey and grandson, Rex, were visiting Rep. Bill Archer in Washington, the Congressman proudly displayed his wedding ring, stating that he had bought it at Houston Jewelry!

A visionary beyond his years and far ahead of his time, Donsky foresaw in 1953 that Houston shoppers would welcome a discount operation of the finest international jewelry and popular brand name merchandise found only at the most elite of retail stores.

Houston Jewelry serves as a monument to Honey Donsky, one of Houston's leading philanthropists and entrepreneurs. Honey, considered to be the father of fine discount merchandise in the Houston area, founded Houston Jewelry in 1953 under the name of Houston Wholesale Jewelers. Many other so-called "discount" stores emerged in Houston since 1953, and many have come and gone. None could match the high quality fine jewelry, national brand inventory, and personal service that Honey Donsky featured.

With the late Dave Rubin and his wife, Ruth, as partners along with Honey's wife, Margaret, the four started Houston Wholesale Jewelers above the old Baker's Shoe Store on Main and Rusk with less than 5,000 square feet of space. You would have to go through an obscure door on Rusk and then go up an elevator to get into the store. Yet people found it . . . and after finding it, flocked to it.

Daughter Dana (now at U.H. Law School) began helping the very first year and every Christmas vacation throughout her school years. Many family friends - Marc Grossberg, Steven Paine (now attorneys) and Dr. Gary Nimitz - to name but a few worked,



Pictured above are Dave Rubin, left and Honey Donsky helping customers at the original Houston Jewelry on Main and Rusk.

when students at Houston Jewelry of the Houston operations, first during the busy Christmas seasons. Son-in-law Andy, now C.E.O. (Continued on Page Thirteen)

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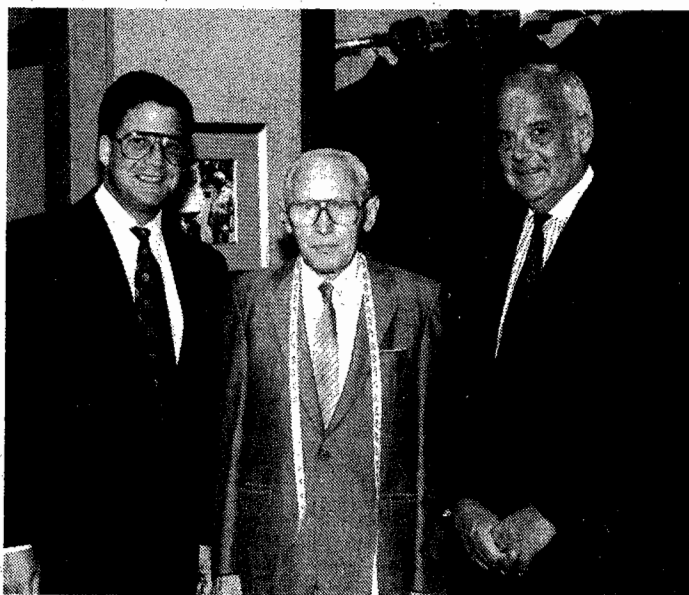


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From left, Michael Wiesenthal, Sol Mitelman, Harold Wiesenthal

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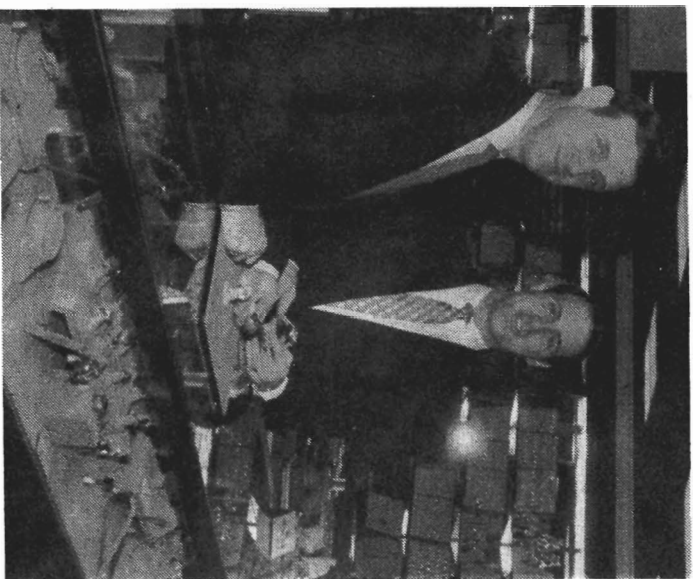
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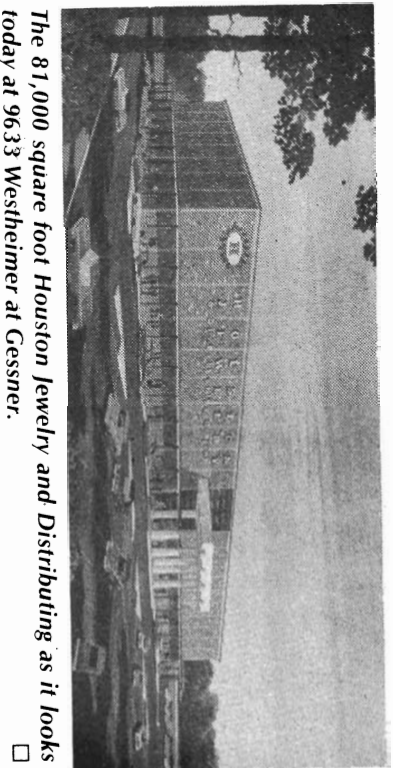
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## Honey Donsky and Houston Jewelry



A father and son team at Houston Jewelry, Andrew Solomon, chief executive officer and his son, Rex. □



The 81,000 square foot Houston Jewelry and Distributing as it looks today at 9633 Westheimer at Gessner. □

From Page Four

worked at Houston Jewelry at Christmas during his college years at Brandeis (where he and Dana met).

"We had maybe six people to help out," recalls Sylvia Goldstein, current office manager of the downtown store. "I had been attending the University of Houston when I was asked by Uncle Donsky to come help out during Christmas. Sylvia recalled that the 1953 store carried fine jewelry, silver, watches, small appliances, leather goods and a few other sundry items.

The store was a success from the start. In 1955, just two years after opening, Donsky and Rubin moved the street to larger quarters in the Houston Club Building, where they had 10,000 square feet, twice the original size.

In 1961 Houston Wholesale Jewelers became Houston Jewelry and Distributing Co. and in 1966 moved to a beautiful 25,000 square foot building at Milam at Rusk which Donsky purchased to house Houston Jewelry.

In the meantime, brother Ervin Donsky in Dallas expanded Sterling Wholesale Jewelers to Sterling Jewelry & Distributing Co., with brothers Honey and Nathan as the two major investors. The two companies worked closely together for twelve years, jointly produced their well known catalog, and merged their operations in 1973.

Besides the Donsky-Solomon family, Honey's business is well represented by members of the extended family. Buck Solinger, Donsky's brother-in-law, has been with the family business since 1957, and now runs the downtown location, a sparkling jewel of a store at Fannin and Clay. Niece Sylvia Goldstein, is

office manager of the downtown store, nephew Steve Saks is head of the Westheimer personnel department and the store's G.I.A. diamond expert and cousin Nathan Caplovitz is office manager at Westheimer.

Ruth Rubin, who is considered family, stayed on with Houston Jewelry after her husband's untimely passing in 1957 and continued as the primary jewelry buyer and head of the 14K gold sales department until she chose to retire in the early 1980s. She still comes in during Christmas and other special occasions to service her many loyal customers.

From the beginning, Honey Donsky believed in giving a chance to immigrants from various countries, and today Houston Jewelry is a veritable "United Nations," consisting of employees from Russia, Israel, China, Pakistan, Greece (including Westheimer Floor Manager, Michael Soulos), India, the Middle East and other lands. "We have 11 different languages among our midst to accommodate our international trade," says Andrew Solomon proudly.

An example of the type employee who got a chance from the Donsky-Solomon family is Lo Ha Kreing. He came to this country from Vietnam in the early 1980s, starting out as a sweeper in the warehouse. He didn't speak a word of English, but he was ambitious. Today, he speaks English fluently and has advanced to head of the electronics department, where he was the top salesperson last year.

Houston Jewelry is unique. It is an extremely upscale department store with the lowest prices in town. It is also one of the few remaining family owned and operated businesses.

Son-in-law Andy Solomon, who runs the Houston operation, has

been with the business for twenty-five years, and Honey's grandsons, Rex and Keith, have been learning the business during school vacations since age 10. Honey wanted his grandsons to know the business inside and out and began teaching Rex and Keith when they were very young. Rex, a 1988 graduate of Brandeis University and current U.H. law student, and Keith, a junior at Amherst College, have always spent school vacations working at Houston Jewelry. Both grandsons have a deep commitment to the store, to the traditions Honey began, and to the values he taught them.

A true pillar of the community, Donsky just recently received the 17th annual David H. White Memorial Award. The criteria for being selected included a commitment to the ideals of Jewish life, service reflecting the highest integrity, love of humanity and active involvement in the Jewish community of Houston.

But one word is missing that probably best describes Honey

Donsky in which his family, his hundreds of employees and multitude of friends will agree. That word is CLASS. □



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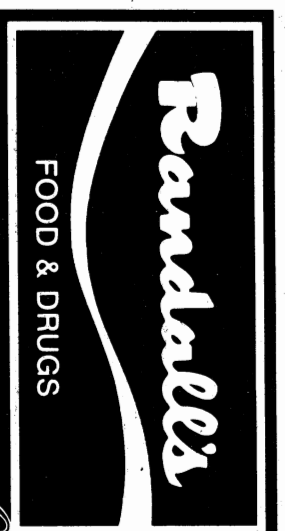
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