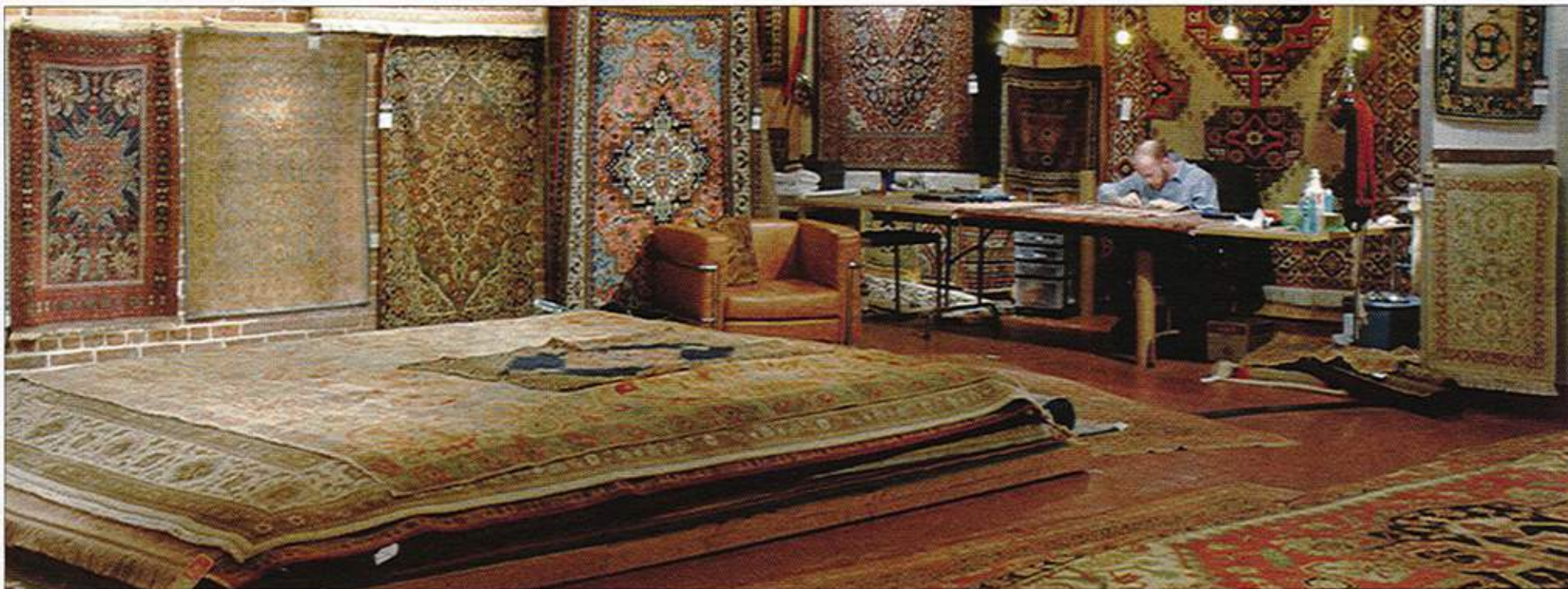


FOCUS ON FAMILY BUSINESSES



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Kevin Ward at work at Ward's Oriental Rug Service & Gallery in Allentown. He also teaches a course on the history and mystery of Oriental rugs.

Covering the Oriental rug business in every way for 15 years

By SANDRA SOLIMAN

Special for Lehigh Valley Business

If you are an artisan, carpet collector or history enthusiast, one step into Ward's Oriental Rug Service & Gallery and you may find your sweet haven.

The Allentown company, in operation nearly 15 years, sells hand-knotted carpets from around the world. It also provides carpet cleaning services.

The owners, Gary and Patricia Ward and their son Kevin Ward, have a passion for serving clients and community and educating the public about the history of the masterpieces. Gary and Patricia run operations, finances and marketing, while Kevin specializes in sales and appraisals.

Not stepping on each other's toes can be a challenge, although the division of labor helps and they manage each other's personalities very well.

"It's fun and rewarding to work together as a family, and you don't see that often," Gary Ward said.

TEACHING OTHERS

More than 40 years ago, Gary Ward wandered into an auction house to buy a piano for Patricia.

Little did he know that he would be leaving with a new passion for collecting rugs. He began collecting them and, ultimately, that led to opening a gallery and store in 2002 in Allentown.

Gary and Patricia Ward and son Kevin. In business since 2002, they sell hand-knotted carpets from around the world.



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

That passion also led to teaching opportunities. The Wards teach courses around the region, including at the Allentown Art Museum and Harrisburg Art Museum and for the American Association of University Women.

Kevin Ward, for example, teaches a course entitled, "Chasing the history, mystery and allure of the Oriental carpet."

\$100 TO \$100K

Today, as one walks through Ward's

showroom on West Union Street, he sees colors bursting from every woven tapestry.

The hand-stitched carpets, which cost \$100 to \$10,000, are predominantly made in the Middle East and beyond, in countries such as Iran, Turkey and India. More than 700 man-hours are needed to make a room-sized carpet.

There is a discount room that features second-hand, Oriental hand-knotted rugs, and Gary Ward forecasts an expansion in coming years to accommodate more sales

WARD'S ORIENTAL RUG SERVICE & GALLERY

- **What:** Sales and service on Oriental and area carpets.
- **Location:** West Union Street, Allentown.
- **No. of employees:** 6.
- **Website:** www.wardsorientalrugservice.com

and cleaning and repair space.

MILLENNIAL MARKET

Ward's does a majority of its business in the Lehigh Valley and tri-state area of Pennsylvania, New Jersey and New York and has the capability to sell around the U.S. and world.

"At Ward's ... it's clear they aren't happy unless their customers are happy," said Tony Iannelli, president and CEO of the Greater Lehigh Valley Chamber of Commerce. "For them, it's as much about building long-lasting customer relationships as it is doing business."

Meanwhile, Ward's is pouncing on a growing niche market in the Oriental rug industry. As millennials gain purchasing power, they want more transitional (a mix between modern and traditional) and modern hand-knotted rugs.

"The influx of people from larger cities, such as New York, Philadelphia ..., is allowing the region to find a sophistication again," Gary Ward said.

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