

# KC's Creative Candles grace tabletops nationwide



Ken Weiner and Pam Fletscher at the Creative Candles factory on Roanoke Road.

**By Barbar Bayer**  
*Staff Writer*

**Photos by Mark Coffey**

Picture the dining room all set and ready for Shabbat dinner. On the table in a place of honor are Bubbe's silver candlesticks all polished and shiny, holding two slender, handcrafted ivory candles just waiting to be lit. The perfect candles for that scenario are made right here in Kansas City by Creative Candles.

Ken Weiner, a member of The New Reform Temple, purchased Creative Candles in July 2005 and recently moved the business to a new, modern facility at 3218 Roanoke Road.

Weiner said he purchased the company, which was founded in 1961, because it had a history of success.

"It had great product that enjoyed tremendous reputation in the market," Weiner said. "And the staff is very dedicated, experienced and committed," said Weiner of the business that currently employs 22 people.

Before purchasing Creative Candles, the 47-year-old Weiner had worked in corporate America most of his professional career.

"I always felt like I wanted to be doing my own thing," he said. "This time I wanted to buy an existing business and make it better."

## **Extensive product line**

The 45-year-old business is known for the quality and variety of its elegant tapers. Weiner said it takes six characteristics to produce a high-quality candle. The candle must be able to hold its shape and color and it must have a slow, even, smokeless and dripless burn.

Creative Candles concentrates on hand crafting two basic candles — tapers and pillars — all produced in a variety of lengths and widths. Votives and tea lights, as well as whimsical birthday candles and Chanukah candles are also produced on



site. Two other types of candles — ball candles and floating candles — are imported from Germany. All told, the company offers candles with “16 delicious fragrances” and more than 47 color choices. There is even a 39-inch taper, which is among the tallest in the world.

“Our best seller is ivory, closely followed by white,” Weiner reported. “Our market tends to be high end and focuses on simple colors.”

The Chanukah candles, which come 45 to the box and will be sold at The Jewish Museum in New York for \$30, come in ivory only.

“We tried royal blue and ivory, but the plain ivory always sold better,” Weiner said.

Pamela Fleischer, Weiner’s wife, who joined him in the business shortly after it was purchased to focus on account development, said the beauty of the dripless Chanukah candles is that people don’t have to scrape melted wax off the menorah every night during the holiday.

“For people who might have a family menorah of significant value, or it’s just sentimental, our candles do it proud,”



Christopher Wood dips a set of wicks to create tapers.

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Fleischer said.

## Handcrafted quality

To make a taper, a craftsman begins with a 28-ply cotton wick, stringing it on a rack that was exclusively designed and built for Creative Candles.

"A quality wick is a fundamental ingredient to a well-burning candle," Weiner said.

Weiner said Creative Candles are known for being smoke resistant and for their long burn time. For example, a nine-inch taper can burn as long as seven hours.

As many as 84 tapers can be made on one rack at a time. Once the wick is strung, each rack is then hand-dipped in a tank of melted, high-quality wax in "one paper-thin" layer at a time until it has reached the desired diameter. That could amount to as many as 25 dips for a 7/8ths-inch-diameter taper.

Once the taper has been dipped and cooled, another craftsman trims the wick. Then, the pair of tapers is wrapped in white paper and placed in a box along with a strip of beeswax that can be wrapped around the

bottom of the candles in case they're too small for the holder. Before the box is stored, it will be affixed with a "Made in the USA" bar-code sticker that states its size and color.

Everything for the pillars and votives is done by hand as well. Once a pillar is unmolded, an artisan flame-finishes the product to give it a polished look. Pillars are then wrapped in a cellophane pouch and closed with an elegant silver cord.

"Non-fragranced pillars are now our fastest growing category," Weiner said.

## The candle business

Weiner said he still gets a thrill when he sees his products being used in public, as they were at the Symphony Ball held recently at the Hyatt Regency Crown Center. He said virtually every major florist in Kansas City, as well as the major hotels and event planners, regularly use Creative Candles at their functions. Others around the country do, too.

"One of our largest customers is the Waldorf Astoria in New York," Weiner said.

Weiner believes his product is popular

with event planners for many reasons, including the fact that many candles are available fragrance-free.

"Our votives burn 10 hours," Weiner said. "And the event planners don't want a fragrance to compete with the flowers or the food."

About half of Creative Candles market is institutional—the hotel, floral, catering and event-planning industries. The company ships products all over the country as well as to such places as Japan, Hong Kong and England. Local customers, however, sometimes have a slight edge when it comes to service.

"We had a local caterer call at 4:30 in the afternoon recently, and she needed candles for an event. She came in about (40 minutes later), and we had the order ready to go," Weiner said.

The other half of Creative Candles' business is wholesale to retailers. Retailers in Kansas City that sell the product include Trapp and Co. and Pryde's Old Westport in Kansas City, Mo., and Dean and Deluca and Ranchmart Hardware, both in Leawood, Kan. Soon, Creative Candles will be available at Halls on the Plaza and at Crown Center.

Ralph Lauren Polo and The Horchow Collection also sell Creative Candles under their private labels. Creative Candles were also stocked by Marshall Fields in Chicago.

"Now that Marshall Fields is Macy's, we're going from 15 to 57 stores. We've very excited to see that happen," Weiner said.

Retailers set their own prices for candles. Dean and Deluca in Leawood sells tapers ranging from \$7.50 to \$9.50 and pillars from \$13.50 to \$18. A box of 10 birthday candles sells for \$8.50.

The way Weiner and Creative Candles does business has already garnered the company honors. Creative Candles was recently one of nine small businesses nominated for the 2006 Heart of American Ethics in Business Award sponsored by Midwest Christian Counseling Center.

Creative Candles is a traditional business that concentrates on making "beautiful candles of exceptional quality and performance." Therefore, industry trends don't concern Weiner too much.

"Our shapes are traditional. Our colors are tried-and-true colors. When we do variety now, it's generally about packaging," he said.

Weiner and Fleischer believe the use of traditional tapers is growing again, and they think the company is well positioned to take advantage of that.

"We like to think our products are an affordable luxury," Fleischer said. **11**



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