

KROGER'S JEWELRY

Grocery shopping for diamonds

Talk about convenience-Kroger now is making it possible to grab a gallon of milk *and* a half-carat diamond engagement ring at the same time.

The grocery-store bling became available at the Kroger at Graceland Shopping Center in May. A month later, the Kroger on Sawmill Road was revamped to make space for a fine jewelry section as well.

In 1999, the Cincinnati-based Kroger chain acquired Fred Meyer Jewelers. For the next five years, Kroger plugged along with its singular purpose of peddling groceries while the Fred Meyer side of the business operated out of malls. But a little over a year ago, Kroger installed its first Fred Meyer jewelry counter inside a Cincinnati grocery.

Maybe the idea of buying a wedding band while pushing a grocery cart filled with Charmin, Doritos and Budweiser doesn't sound romantic. But Kroger is trying to dress up the jewelry areas with carpeting and a dropped ceiling to illuminate the glass displays.

Pete Engle, president of Fred Meyer Jewelers, says shoppers generally park their grocery carts before browsing the selection of fine jewelry-and the options are many, from a \$69 Pulsar watch to a \$2,000

Movado timepiece, or a \$39 bracelet to a three-carat diamond wedding set for \$4,000. Still, there are no walls, and the beep, beep, beep of the grocery checkout lanes is within earshot.

Apparently, customers haven't shied away. "The sales are above our expectations," says Engle. "That's why we're opening two more locations this year in the Columbus market." Those sites have yet to be determined.

He says most of the Fred Meyer customers are shopping for gifts at the Kroger locations, but the stores also have done a brisk bridal business. "It doesn't seem to deter from the emotional side of



Kroger has tried to minimize the grocery-store ambience of the Fred Meyer Jewelers inside its Graceland location.

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The Kroger-Fred Meyer Jewelers collaboration follows the lead of superstores such as Wal-Mart and Meijer, which have had jewelry counters for years. Some people simply appreciate convenience. "For Mother's Day, if you're in buying flowers or a bottle of wine you can get your gift," Engle says. "You get it all done in one shopping experience."

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