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Submitted photos

Mary Oswald, of Virginville, stands in her workshop for her new business, Collier Leeds, where she makes unique dog collars. Right, Lizzie models the Lizzie Collar. Below is the Boone Collar.

## Virginville business arises from love of dogs and history

By Devon Kramer  
Patriot Correspondent

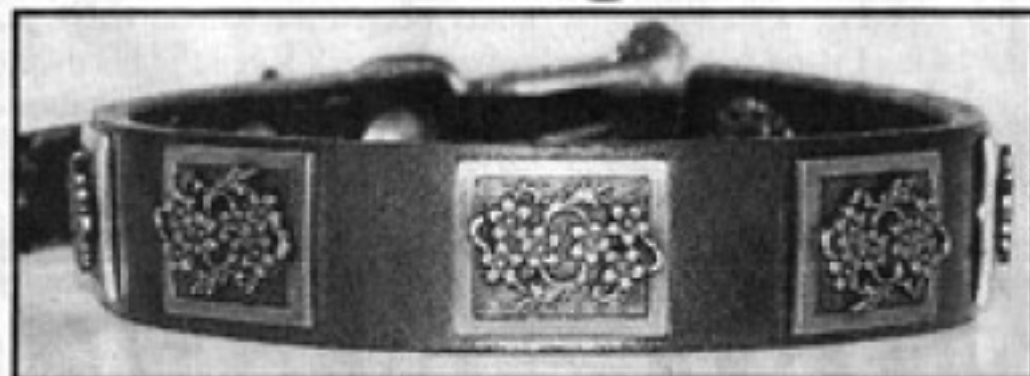
It seems as if dogs and dog lovers alike are appearing everywhere in the news today, whether in entertainment (Marley & Me), politics (Obama's potential puppy), and now, locally, in the world of art.

Mary Oswald, of Virginville, never expected that her love of history and dogs would someday merge and inspire her to start her own business, Collier Leeds.

Recently, Oswald began designing and selling unique history-inspired dog collars out of her home, where she resides with her husband, Kurt, and two daughters, Emma, 21, and Claire, 18.

The story behind Oswald's craft is an interesting one. After living in London with her sister for several years, Oswald moved back to the U.S. and began to work in New York City. It was there that she met up with Kermit and Lisa Oswald, current owners of Sorrelli Jewelry in Kutztown. They introduced her to Kermit's brother, who eventually became her husband.

"I really fell in love with his golden retriever," Oswald joked. "We are both dog lovers and have had them since we met."



Oswald was working as the marketing director for Sorrelli Jewelry when she and her husband took a vacation to visit old acquaintances in England.

"We went to visit Leeds Castle, which is about an hour outside of London, and the former home of Henry VIII. I was surprised to find a dog collar museum there."

Oswald said the variety of elaborate, expensive collars made her realize the special place that dogs hold in their owner's hearts and have throughout history. She began to get an idea.

"I think in the end it was that museum and my love for dogs that gave me the vision to start Collier Leeds," Oswald said. "However, I never had any experience with art before and I'm not a really crafty person, so in order to make my dream a reality, I had to educate myself."

Oswald learned leatherwork, how to sodder, and procure parts. Being a marketing director, advertising and estab-

lishing contacts came much easier.

"I named my business 'Collier Leeds' in part after the Leeds Castle where I received my inspiration. 'Collier' is French for collar," Oswald explained.

Oswald hand cuts each leather collar from the hides of cows that died of natural causes. She uses strong bridal leather for durability. She then combines metal jewelry pieces to create unique ornamentations for the collar.

Oswald's current two pups, Lizzie, a mutt, and Louie, a bichon, are her guinea pigs and models for her new designs. She names all of her designs after dogs that were special to her or her family.

"I have been getting plenty of positive feedback from my customers, and that is very encouraging," Oswald said. "The one thing most people say is that the collars are even more beautiful in person."

Although the current economic status doesn't make it

easy for new businesses' success, Oswald stays positive about it.

"I figure that since I wanted my business to start off slowly, as I learn what works, this economic situation is perfect for that," she said. "I hope that as our economy grows, my business will grow with it."

Oswald's current project is designing a collar for the puppy that president-elect Barack Obama promised his daughters, and one for the German Shepherd puppy Joe Biden recently purchased in Pennsylvania.

"They aren't aware that I am going to create a collar for their dogs, of course," Oswald said. "It's a personal project. But I think it's a fun and, hey, you never know, they just might love them."

In the future, Oswald plans on expanding her business to include leashes and dog charms.

"People have already asked me to design belts for them," she said. "So who knows where my business will go!"

Oswald's collars are available for purchase on her website, and at several stores, including The Bark On Main in Kutztown, and Godfrey's Dogdom in Mohnton.

For more information, visit [www.collierleeds.com](http://www.collierleeds.com).