

Passion Project To Career

Bulletproof Sportswear

Ken & Amy Richardson

Who is Bulletproof Sportswear?

Amy Richardson is an IFBB Bodybuilding Pro who's been competing for about 10 years and I started powerlifting 40 years ago in 1982. We began as athletes, in the sports we love, and took that passion beyond the stage. **Creating something the athletes can enjoy is how this husband-and-wife team began Bulletproof Sportswear.** In 2016, Amy had competed as a pro a couple times and she really wanted to compete at the Arnold Sports Festival. We went as spectators, to hang out and check things out, in particular because we had friends in the powerlifting match. Ironically, we went past a booth and we saw a piece of jewelry that Amy liked. It was a dumbbell, so I purchased it for her even though the price was outrageous. Later, I told Amy that I can make that. She looked at me like I was crazy, but I have some friends in the jewelry business in Michigan and being an artist, designing a piece of jewelry is easy for me. So I did just that. I made a CAD drawing and produced the piece of jewelry. That's how our business of making jewelry got started. The first pieces were a little dumbbell, a 45lb plate which was the size of a quarter and a 100lb plate that was the size of a 50 cent piece (just as a joke because I'm a powerlifter and we lift 100lb plates because we're stronger than bodybuilders) and a bent barbell. I had looked online to see what other people were making so that's the four pieces we started with in 2016.

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Art & Business

I've always been into photography and all sorts of artistic avenues. I actually shot the cover of Powerlifting USA magazine. The art part has always been easy for me. Designing the jewelry began with putting it on a CAD machine. I had a buddy make the mold and do the pouring and we went from there. Amy is the financial boss and takes care of all the orders, customer service and negotiating for a booth. She saves me a bunch of headaches because her strong points are my weak points.

The Here, the Now and the Future

Amy and I do this for fun and it is how we make our living doing this now. She competes and we travel to events and that's basically what we've been doing since February 2016. **Where do you see the business going?** At some point, we would like to cut back on some of the traveling and focus on



the bigger shows. Since our children don't seem to be interested, ideally, we'd like to find like-minded, trustworthy people that could travel to shows and set up a booth. Ultimately, if each state has a team that covers the events in that state, they would sell our jewelry products. We do have one other goal, we'd like to make the jewelry for the Arnold Sports Festival since we already have the NPC, IFBB, Wings of Strength and Olympia jewelry. We've met with them to discuss it, but as of yet, nothing has transpired. **Would you try to do a piece of jewelry for each of the national level shows?** We've been approached about doing an individual piece for the North Americans and Masters Nationals. Right now, it's feasibility versus opportunity. The CAD drawing, designing, making and then pouring the mold, making sure it looks decent, determining the quantity to make because you can't just pour one and if that works then you have to sell them. It's a process. An alternative that we've done in the past is using the NPC charm that we made and Jim Manion liked and approved and we'll engrave the name of the show on the back. That saves us money and it looks nice. It's a challenge to come up with something new that people will like and buy. There is always a risk involved and you have to weigh that against the cost. **What does a new piece cost to make?** Cost depends on

how big a piece of jewelry is, how much silver is involved. Some pieces may cost \$1000 to make and others may cost up to 5X that amount before you get it right. Your cost can add up quickly, add to that booth fees and travel expenses and you easily have to sell 50 pieces just to make your money back. Each new piece is a lot to consider. We've been approached to do rings and we are always open to have that discussion. It would be cool to make a ring for the Olympia winners for example. We'll just have to see. I know I could do it but there's a lot of questions to think about such as would you want to include stones? Do you want it to be engraveable? I actually made mine and Amy's wedding rings but we don't wear them in the gym, just when we go out.

Other Sports Arenas

In addition to the bodybuilding shows, we also promote our jewelry at powerlifting and weightlifting meets. Doing something for NASCAR would be really cool, but we haven't really explored that avenue. I could see the drivers' logos on a charm. Maybe that's something I will pursue in the future. I've considered CrossFit, too. I have to do some research to come up with the best design.

This Year

Amy's going to compete in July. She's planning to do 2-3 pro shows in a row and try to qualify for the Olympia. Traveling makes it so hard to train so we may have to cut back our schedule a little this year. She's the face of the company. Nobody wants to see me; they want to see her. Three months before earning her pro card, Amy got her pro total in powerlifting. At 132lbs she lifted more than 1100lbs to win the Pro Cincinnati Powerlifting Pro Am with a squat of 490lbs, bench of 270lbs and deadlift of 460lbs. She is one of only three women who are Pro in both sports. Amy has six world powerlifting records. If she could win a Pro Masters or any Pro show, she would be the only person to ever win a pro powerlifting meet and pro bodybuilding show.

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Best Seller

Our petite barbell and petite 45lb plate both sell well but our best seller is a small dumbbell with CZ stones that we sell for \$70. It's made of 925 sterling silver and all of our jewelry is coated with Rhenium, a non-allergic, shiny non-corrosive white metal. We sell more of those than everything else combined. The bikini girls buy them, they are a large part of the sport and they want their jewelry petite. **What percentage of sales are online?** We don't do a lot of online sales. Most of our sales are in person where we can have a conversation, you can touch the jewelry, see it, feel it, try it on and build relationships with our customers. People recognize our jewelry is real jewelry and our reputation is built on having good quality pieces that you won't see anywhere else because everything is our own designs. **Have you ever thought about**

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having your own retail store? Might be fun to try but Amy says we would need a bunch of investors. I have a friend in the jewelry business and she says when we're ready to try to get our jewelry in the stores, she would be the representative to help us out. She's mentioned that to me a couple times. The hard part is trying to scale; our cash flow would have to be 10X greater than we currently have to fill the orders. That's some big money. We have sold some pieces to a few small companies at wholesale prices where they then sell them. They carry our jewelry because they know you can't get it anywhere else. **How far in advance do you have to start working on a new piece to have it ready?** About 6-8 weeks. **Where do you get ideas for new pieces from?** Out of my head, people are always giving us ideas. A lot of people want big stuff like the heavy, chunky, curved, chained bracelet with a big, huge dumbbell in the center. It's like 80-90 grams of sterling silver. It's a big piece and we made three of them and they were gone that day. I made ten more and we sold those in a matter of minutes. Someone asked if we could make that into a necklace, but it would just be so heavy so I made the necklace without the dumbbell and again it sold right away. You just never know.

Grateful for Good People

We have people who come back to Pittsburgh wanting to know if we're going to be there. They want to pick up a new piece of jewelry and we always try to have something for them. **How much repeat business do you have?** Some customers buy something every month! They do that routinely. Part of that is people supporting small businesses, but I would say it's probably close to 35% repeat business.

There are so many people who have helped us tremendously, Jake Wood, the Manions, Gary Udit, the people in Pittsburgh, Issabelle Terrell and Lenda Murray. I'm very loyal and appreciative to all of them, they've always been a positive help in promoting our products. When we originally started Bulletproof Sportswear, we started with apparel, but when I saw the jewelry, I said that's way cooler than a t-shirt. The jewelry was the niche market that set us apart. We also sell Otomix shoes. We are the only company that does that in the U.S. **How did that happen?** Basically, Otomix was not happy with the person that had been selling their shoes. Unbeknownst to me, several key people held a meeting and decided that I should become the new Otomix distributor. They said, you don't have to do anything. We've already ordered 8 cases and they'll be at the North American show when you get here. It's all been set up already. That's how we got into selling the shoes and it has been a good revenue generator for us. They sell pretty well because they are great shoes, it's a win-win for us. This business has been fun for us. We've met a lot of good people and we just enjoy doing this.