



The Teaser®

The Story Behind the Championship Ring

By Jan Fogt

With a heritage dating back to the 1700s when, as British loyalists, the Pinder family emigrated from New England to the then British Crown Colony of The Bahamas, it's been one of the most famous names in the Americas. From Europe to the New World, Pinders helped shape history.

The clan includes Congressional Medal of Honor (1944) recipient John J. Pinder, Canadian writer Leslie Hall Pinder and Moody Blues rock musician Michael Pinder. Scattered along Florida's east coast from Key West to Stuart the name is associated with pioneering commercial fishermen and with respected seafood purveyors and nurseries. In the Bahamas, Pinder remains one of the most famous names as well and includes the Catholic Church's first Bahamian Bishop Patrick Christopher Pinder. It also identifies the nation's first family of jewelry.

Since the late 1980s, Monica Pinder and her brothers Andrew and Christopher have been fueling trends in marine jewelry design, starting with their first sand dollar pendants and necklaces and conch pearl rings in 1989 at the inaugural store on Green Turtle Cay.

Started principally by Monica, now Monica Pinder-Higgs, the store grew out of a passion for jewelry and design that coalesced after several years working after school for a Nassau jewelry store specializing in native conch pearl and pink coral stone designs. The only daughter of Sherry and Percival (Percy) Pinder – a former director of Solomon Brothers in Nassau – no doubt her parents expected their daughter to become a lawyer or banker but Monica had other ideas.

"I was passionate about the wonderful marine animals we have here in The Bahamas and loved the whole process of designing and hand making jewelry using the lost wax method. To me it seemed natural to put the two together," she explained. She also enjoyed making jewelry as an art form. "It became something I wanted to pursue, something my parents embraced and supported," she said.

Eventually she and her brothers attended professional schools to learn their trade. Their parents also were behind the opening of the first Sand Dollar Store, a division of Abaco Gold, on Green Turtle Cay in 1989. Not to be confused with Abaco Gold of Key West, which opened several years later (the two stores are not related), the business was the first of its kind in the area. Monica says this was the first jewelry store in the region to be solely owned by Bahamians, "by 9th generation Abaconians creating their own designs."

Newly married to Laurence Higgs, whose family also dates back several generations in the Abacos, it quickly became a family institution with her recently retired parents helping customers and with brothers Christopher and Andrew carving both her and their designs in wax from which the



The Pinder family of Abaco Gold at their Marsh Harbour store – (l to r) Monica, Andrew, Sherry and Percy.

molds were cast. Those first designs, she adds, included Abaco Gold's signature sand dollar pendant, for which the store was named, golden conch shells with conch pearl jewels, starfish, dolphins or porpoises and a billfish. Growing from those first designs Abaco Gold today manufactures some 500 unique nautical and marine pieces from 14K gold, many of them one of a kind pieces, said Monica.

Much as it is today at its Marsh Harbour location opposite the entrance to Abaco Beach Resort and Boat Harbour Marina, the Sand Dollar Shoppe became the 'go-to' spot in the Abacos for tropical clothing by manufacturers such as Icantoo, Hook & Tackle and Guy Harvey and for decorative house ware, gifts, and quality nautical shirts and clothing for hardcore fisherman. In the late 90s with her husband Laurence and his Family starting a major new marine business – Marsh Harbour Boatyards – Monica and her family decided to sell the location on Green Turtle to move to the Marsh Harbour location.

With a blank slate, they expanded the Sand Dollar Shoppe and opened in 1998. Today, Abaco Gold designs can be purchased at the Sand Dollar Shoppe. Other locations for Abaco Gold's famed billfish and fish pendants, rings and fine jewelry pieces include the Ebb Tide Shops at Hope Town and the Harbour Shop at Treasure Cay.

The following year, Al Behrendt began thinking about creating a new one of a kind grand prize for the winner of the Bahamas Billfish Championship and contacted Andrew, Christopher and Monica to make his concept a reality.

We already were involved creating specially designed jewelry for some of the annual fishing tournaments for top anglers and winners including those in the BBC that led to our becoming a gold sponsor for the series, said Monica. Those relationships also led to great friendships with Al and his family and many of the anglers and their families, she adds.

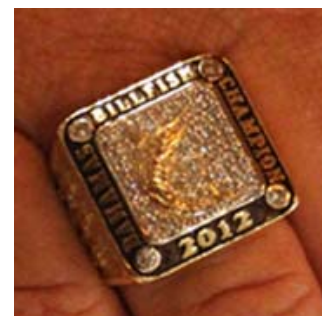
After several brainstorming sessions between Andrew and Al Behrendt and the BBC's steering committee, the decision was made to create a "championship ring" for the overall winner, a show piece that in the words of Al Behrendt, "rivals the Superbowl Ring." Made of 14K gold, the exclusive square-shape ring features a leaping blue marlin in the center surrounded by a sea of foam recreated with two full carats of set diamonds. The first recipient was Michael Moskowitz on the Rybovich *In Roam*.

This is the official BBC Championship ring, an award that Abaco Gold contributes to the tournament every year. From the ring, Abaco Gold has created pendants and a smaller version of the ring for those wanting a memento of the event.

For this year only, to commemorate the 40th anniversary, Andrew and his sister Monica have created another one of a kind ring recognizing the milestone. The custom designed ring features not just white diamonds in its design but black diamonds and blue and yellow sapphires as well as 14K gold. It's a unique design that pays homage to The Bahamas with a facsimile of the Bahamian flag and to the blue marlin, the target species of the BBC anglers, says Monica.



During Conch Fest, Andrew Pinder makes a mean Conch Salad in addition to being a top-notch jeweler.



In addition to the ring, Abaco Gold also has created a handsome Bahamian flagged coin that anyone can purchase commemorating the 40th anniversary Bahamas Billfish Championship; the world's longest running blue marlin tournament series. "Two fantastic pieces our anglers will cherish," adds Behrendt.

So this year is a celebration for all. For the BBC this makes four decades of great fishing and camaraderie; for Andrew and Monica Pinder-Higgs and Abaco Gold, it marks 24 years of creating some of the world's most beautiful marine jewelry.



2012 BBC winner, Frank Rodriguez proudly displays the 'Championship Ring' that was presented to him by Abaco Gold's Monica Higgs.