



Wilson AND CAROL BEGAY JEWELER



Traditional Navajo silversmiths Wilson and Carol Begay have been practicing their craft since 1969. The acknowledged masters of the art of sand cast jewelry, this husband and wife team come from families well known for their jewelry making.

Wilson's father, Luke Begay, is credited with teaching them much of the craft, including the sand cast style that the family is famed for. Luke is a renowned Navajo jewelry master, who gained many years of experience at the famous Kirk Brothers Trading Company in Gallup, New Mexico. Similarly, Carol's parents, Angela and Allen Chee were both silversmiths who worked alongside C.G. Wallace, the famous jewelry trader from Zuni, New Mexico.

The Begay's traditional sand cast jewelry is a unique Navajo art form. Careful discipline and years of practice are required to complete the process. First, two pieces of Tufa or pumice stone are ground together to create two flat surfaces. The jewelry design is then carved into one of the two stones. After an opening is carved from the design to the top and bottom of the sandstone, the two pieces are tied together, with the carved surface facing inward. Silver is then poured into the opening at the top of the design. After cooling, the stones are separated and the casting is removed. The silver is then smoothed and any stones that are part of the design are set in silver bezels that are soldered to the buckle, bracelet, or other jewelry creation.

The Begay's routinely work as a pair, with Wilson concentrating on the casting and building the foundations of the jewelry and Carol setting the stones and doing the finishing work. They work together to design their jewelry and their variety of styles includes bracelets, concho belts, and rings. Living and working in Gallup, New Mexico, the Begay's, along with their three daughters continuing the family tradition.

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