

# American Roots

## JUL 30 2008 BRONZING BABY SHOES



When tiny booties, moccasins and Mary Jane-style shoes arrive at the American Bronzing Co. in Columbus, Ohio, Brenda Dart takes a good look at them before she tags, stacks and sends them on their way to be bronzed.

Sometimes you get some really cute shoes, and you just fall in love with them," says Dart, 49, as she labels a pair of small oxfords with a red order number. During her 24 years at the company, Dart has unpacked and labeled tens of thousands of baby shoes, helping postal purveyors and grandparents across the nation preserve a treasured keepsake for a beloved child.

"It's a memory business," says Bob Kaynes, president and CEO of the company. "When you look at bronzed shoes, you remember what the baby was doing when he wore those shoes. It's a trophy to babyhood, an opportunity to display something instead of putting it in a drawer."

Kaynes' grandmother, Violet Shushach, started the business more than 70 years ago. It all began when she stocked a department store in Cleveland offering to bronze baby shoes, coating them with a layer of metal to create keepsakes for families. Inaugural, she took the shoes of her child, Sue—Bob Kaynes' mother.

Bob Kaynes, president and CEO of American Bronzing Co.



Further—and had them bronzed. Shushach was so impressed that she started her own shoe-bronzing business.

In 1934, Shushach and her husband, Sam, founded the Bronz-Shoe Co., and in 1992 they created a new division—the American Bronzing Co. Since 1994, the family-owned business has bronzed more than 14 million baby shoes.

Today, the American Bronzing Co. has 30 employees in its 40,000-square-foot facility, and bronzes 50,000 to 60,000 baby shoes annually, as well as thousands of other cherished items such as hats, books, pacifiers, toy cars and even oversized shoes for Ringling Bros. and Burman & Busby's retiring clowns.

Of course, bronzing baby shoes is a painstaking process. After each pair of shoes is carefully labeled, they are prepared for bronzing. That's when Krista Maynard, a 26-year employee, shapes and softens each shoe, tying and trimming the laces. Unless a customer makes a specific request, she doesn't repair any imperfections or holes.

"This is an old pair," says Maynard, 58, examining a pair of shoes. "We get some that are really worn. These kids are probably my age now."

The shoes then are placed on a metal rack and dipped into a large vat of bubbling electroplating solution, which over three hours coats them with a heavy layer of copper, because "bronzing" actually is copper plating.

After the bronzing process is complete, the shoes are cleaned with water, buffed, polished, lacquered, mounted on a base, and returned to customers. From start to finish, the entire process takes about six to eight weeks. And once shoes are bronzed, they'll endure for generations to come.

"We say they'll last forever," Kaynes says. "They just won't break down over time."

To have a pair of shoes bronzed costs from \$39.95 to \$54.95, depending on the shoe style.

For Jane Green of Cincinnati, the cost was a small price to pay to have her grandson's first pair of shoes bronzed in 2006. "I wanted to have something for him to have to show his children," says Green, 60. "I was very surprised at the details on the shoes. Even old scuff marks were evident. I was extremely pleased and will do this again for my other grandson."

Just as it preserves keepsakes for grandmothers like Green, American Bronzing Co. also preserves the heritage of its own founding grandmother, Violet Shushach.

"I feel tremendous pride in carrying on the business my grandmother started," Kaynes says. "I think she would be very pleased about the lasting legacy she created."

Story by Vivian Wagner of New Concord, Ohio.

Click on this story at [americanprofile.com/articles](http://americanprofile.com/articles) for a link to the American Bronzing Co. website.

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