

# VALERE RENE HANDBAGS

## AMAZING STYLE AND DESIGN...HANDCRAFTED WITH SOUTHERN CHARM

Following a 20-year career in dentistry management, a personal health battle and a newfound passion for design led local designer and business owner Valere Gregory to the release of one of Northwest Arkansas' fastest growing handbag lines. Too sick to return to her dentistry career, with no formal training and a dining room as her workspace, Gregory took to her sewing machine for therapy, and soon after, Valere Rene Handbags was born.

It didn't take long for Gregory's collection of quality, USA-made handbags, totes, travel bags, and accessories to take off. In just over a year, Valere Rene Handbags moved from Gregory's dining room table to a brick-and-mortar boutique in downtown Rogers, as well as the shelves of more than 20 boutiques located throughout Arkansas and the South, and unexpectedly, a boutique up north in East Haddam, Conn. Gregory's designs even caught the eye of Martha Stewart, who nominated the line as a 2015 finalist for the Martha Stewart American Made Award, recognizing American entrepreneurs and craftspeople.

Starting a handbag line in just over a year, especially while severely sick, is no small feat. To tell us more about how she got to where she is today, Gregory shares the inspiration behind her handbags and gives us a glimpse into her passion for designing.

**WE WANT TO FOCUS ON YOUR AMAZING HANDBAG LINE BUT, SINCE IT WAS ULTIMATELY BORN OUT OF YOUR ILLNESS, CAN YOU BRIEFLY EXPLAIN THAT?**

I have to chuckle at the word "briefly" because it was a very long and difficult process to find out what was making me sick. I first thought it was a chest cold – and that was in November 2010. After months of tests, diagnoses ranging from a leaky heart valve to liver failure, breathing treatments and still feeling so sick, my doctors recommended I go to Mayo Clinic, where specialists discovered a mass at the base of my appendix. I had successful surgery there, but by then my immune system was

in pretty bad shape. A lot more happened before that diagnosis and after it...none of it was simple. Those were my darkest times but I would honestly go through it all over to get what I ended with – a closer relationship with my husband, girls and God...and the bonus has been Valere Rene Handbags!

**WHAT SPARKED YOUR PASSION AND LED YOUR DESIRE TO DESIGN AND CREATE YOUR OWN HANDBAG LINE?**

I've always been interested in fashion, but what really sparked all of this was my wanting to give purses to my daughters. We were down to a single income because of my illness, and were trying to cut corners any way possible. Even so, I didn't want our girls to start their freshman and junior years in high school without new purses!

**WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE PART ABOUT DESIGNING HANDBAGS?**

When you're starting from scratch, anything is possible. I really like being able to sketch something out, then see how everything comes together as a finished product.

**IS THERE SOMETHING THAT YOU CREDIT FOR HELPING YOUR BRAND TO GET OFF THE GROUND AND FOR YOUR STORE BECOMING A REALITY?**

The event that really helped things take off was a shop-for-a-cause open house that I hosted. At that point, fabric and bags had really taken over the house, so I just invited everyone over! A portion of the proceeds went to both the Taylor McKeen Shelton Foundation and the Healing Hands of Mercy Massage Foundation. Taylor was the son of a friend of mine, and HHMMF really helped me when I was sick by providing free massages. Also, we can't forget to mention our business partners, Burt and Erin Box of the Moxie Group. They have been invaluable in helping us open the store and grow the business.





### WHAT DOES A DAY IN YOUR SHOP LOOK LIKE?

Organized chaos! Sewing machines are always humming, irons are steaming and fabric is flying. There are only four of us making the bags, counting myself, so we're always going full speed. Somehow, we manage to laugh a lot, which is the only thing that keeps us from going crazy!

### WHAT DO YOU LOVE MOST ABOUT BEING A SMALL BUSINESS OWNER?

Freedom – not having to answer to a boss. Having worked for others for years, I know how I want to be treated. I always try to treat our team members that way.

### WHAT IS THE BEST BUSINESS ADVICE YOU HAVE EVER RECEIVED?

Kelly Stuckey, owner of Crown Beauty Bar, told me to always be true to myself. I also remind myself daily to remember my faith. When I was sick, I prayed a lot. I mean, I got up close and personal with our God and in the end He led me down His joyous path that I am on right now.

### CURRENTLY, WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE VALERE RENE HANDBAG OR ACCESSORY AND WHY?

My favorite is the Rene Tote. This tote is made from fun yet durable fabrics, accented with leather handles and a cross-body strap. It's a great size for any woman who has to carry everything from planners to tablets or small laptops...and everything in between. ■

To purchase Valere Rene Handbags, visit the Valere Rene boutique at 210 South 1st St. in downtown Rogers, or visit [www.vrhandbags.com](http://www.vrhandbags.com) to place an online order. Valere Rene Handbags are also sold at these local retailers: Glo Limited, Impressions Boutique & Gifts, Kate Austin, Riffraff and Whimsy Whoo.

## Preserving generations of regional history

118 W. Johnson Avenue, Springdale  
Open Monday through Saturday  
10 a.m.–5 p.m.

### Free Admission

[shilohmuseum.org](http://shilohmuseum.org) • 479-750-8165

**On the Razorback Regional Greenway**



## Quality Imaging Close to Home

The caring team at Arkansas Medical Imaging brings a new level of medical imaging to the community and provides:

- Same-day appointments
- Front door parking
- Average of 30-50% lower cost than hospital centers
- Experienced, friendly care team
- All major insurance plans accepted
- Accredited by the American College of Radiology

**NEW!**  
3-D Mammography –  
First in Benton  
County!  
Call us today to  
schedule your  
appointment.

ARKANSAS

MEDICAL IMAGING  
& OPEN MRI

479-254-0434

[armedimaging.com](http://armedimaging.com)

Three convenient locations:

Rogers (Benton County) | Fayetteville | Fort Smith (MRI Only)

OPEN MRI | 1.5T Wide-Bore MR | CT | Ultrasound | Bone Density | 3-D Mammography

