

Abby Henry presents her creation "Landfill Denied"



FASHION FORWARD



Caitlyn Kohn

Tech Center Program Outfits Tomorrow's Design Leaders

by LINDA L. ESTERSON photography by NIKOLA TZENOV

"I don't design clothes. I design dreams."

This statement by fashion designer Ralph Lauren underscores the work at the Carroll County Career and Technology Center, where students in the Textiles and Fashion Careers Program are creating their futures.

Students from across the county spend their mornings at the Tech Center, developing professional skills and technical knowledge that could ultimately lead to careers in the fashion industry. They join the program in the spring of their junior year and continue through the fall of their senior year. Over the course of their studies, they research, plan, design and create 12 ensembles that they model for classmates and present their creations in a student-run fashion show in January, which serves as their final exam.

The program aims to instill confidence in the students who contemplate careers in the industry, explains Catherine Harris, program instructor.

Harris is an alum of the program, which she credits for her full scholarship to the Maryland Institute College of Art for fashion. She worked at London Fog and later earned a teaching certificate from Hood College, with the intent of leading classes at a fabric store. When a previous Carroll County Career and Technology instructor announced her retirement, Harris received a recommendation for the position. That was 31 years ago.

"It's really an honor for me to be their teacher, because I get to see the young generation and what they're thinking, their execution and just how they process things," she says. "One of the things that really excites me is their concern for the environment. A lot of products are made of synthetics, but they're worn maybe one or two times, and they go to a landfill. It's awful. These are the people who will change that."

Not only do the students create their projects, but they're also taught to support the community. The recent class of students made bright pillowcases that were donated to Ryan's Case for Smiles to give hospitalized children an emotional boost. In addition, local organizations hire the class to create products. Last year, gingerbread dolls were sold to a retail store for customer gifts. Proceeds help fund the fashion show's supplies.

Catherine Harris



A STITCH IN TIME

The classroom at the Tech Center is a sewist's paradise, with many yards of colorful fabrics hung on racks and stacked in bins. Stations with sewing machines, drawers and additional bins stocked with pins, buttons and threads are strategically placed around the room.

Varied assignments give students a chance not only to develop outfits that meet different goals, but also to work with contrasting materials. Students must consider the type of fabric selected, what the project should look like and why they chose the particular fabric and specific garment. Then, the students create a practice garment out of muslin before sewing the final ensemble. They have a week from start to finish for each outfit.

For corporate business wear, students engineered an outfit they wore to a mock interview with area business leaders who visited the school. They also made costumes for characters they researched: outerwear, which was a fully lined jacket or coat, and a "landfill-denied" piece, which incorporated parts of two donated formal dresses into a completely different outfit.

▶ CONTINUED ON PG. 52

Gavin Finneran presents his outfit at the fashion show.



◀ CONTINUED FROM PG. 51

“Chemical dye wear” required students to use chemicals to remove dye from fabric, observe the results and engineer an outfit from that material. “Sustainability” directed students to create a wearable item from discarded materials.

Students also created formal wear and themed wear. Their design work also included an outfit promoting self-care, wellness and mental health, as well as a personal outfit for someone based on their preferred fabrics and colors. The course culminated in their design and production of two children’s outfits.

In addition, Harris arranged field trips to Potomac Mills, an outlet mall in Woodbridge, Virginia; Sew ’N Sweep, a sewing machine, fabric and vacuum store in Westminster; and Cultivated, a Westminster boutique, to experience the business side of fashion.

“I try to help them see that all of the things they’ve been learning are wrapped together. The chemistry is there, the math is there and the social wellness is there,” says Harris.

DRESSING FOR SUCCESS

Ever since she was a little girl, Caitlyn Kohn has found inspiration through fashion.

“There’s no other job I’ve ever wanted,” she says. “I just always loved being able to express myself through clothing because a first impression is really important.”

Kohn dresses with intent, in bright fabrics and items like sparkly hats.

“I feel like my personality shines through my outfits very much,” she says.



Caitlyn Kohn’s sustainability project incorporated trashed items like old pom poms, cans, plastic bags and tissue paper to create an outfit.

Today, she’s focused on sustainability and combating pollution from discarded clothing by creating new clothing. She’s used old scarves from her grandmother in several projects, including a skirt she wears often.

Kohn’s sustainability class project incorporated trashed items like old pom poms, cans, plastic bags and tissue paper to create an outfit. She found the formal wear project the most challenging as she incorporated multiple layers of ruffles over a lined crinoline skirt to make a ball gown. She also used a top from an existing dress to prioritize sustainability.

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Gavin Finneran, Catherine Harris and Abby Henry prepare backstage.



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Abby Henry prepares her clothes for the fashion show.

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For his sustainability project, Gavin Finneran used a swimming pool raft to create shorts and a jacket. Finneran has been interested in fashion and sewing since he created a fashion exhibit for his fourth-grade talent show. A 10th-grade sewing class at Westminster High School taught him to make his own clothes and sparked his interest in applying to the Tech Center program.

Abby Henry sewed clothes for Barbie and American Girl dolls, and in seventh grade, she made a skirt for herself. Henry found the formal wear project the most challenging, experiencing issues with the lining fabric and having to redo it at the last minute after it turned out too small for her. She enjoyed crafting her active-wear ensemble, which included a tennis skirt, tank top, and wrap top.

In addition to modeling their creations, each student has a role in the fashion show. Henry and Finneran serve as co-creative directors, overseeing the budget, approving the work of the other students and coordinating with other departments in the Tech Center, such as video production for filming, woodshop for set design, and printing of marketing materials.

LOOKING AHEAD

Alum Alannah Van Horn parlayed her experience in the program into a career as an interior designer at an Owings Mills firm after graduating from High Point University.

Van Horn remembers Harris sharing fashion's role in everything, including the interior of an automobile, which inspired her to pursue a career in interior design.



Gavin Finneran presents his project on chemical dyes.

She credits the program for teaching her discipline and time management skills, which have helped her with college, internships and her current position.

Henry hopes to focus on the business side of the industry, in merchandising, marketing or as a buyer or personal shopper. She has been accepted to her first-choice school, the Savannah College of Art and Design (SCAD) in Savannah, Georgia.

Finneran, who is more interested in fashion marketing and trade, has applied to SCAD, the Fashion Institute of Technology (FIT) in New York and the design program at Stevenson University in Owings Mills.

Kohn plans to start at a community college before transferring to a four-year program. She hopes to pursue a career in fashion design and ultimately own a boutique.

"I feel that when I look good, I feel good, [especially] in a fun outfit," she says. "I want to be that person who could create those unique pieces that would make other people feel like their most authentic selves." 