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A vested interest

02/08/2004

Area designer puts styles on runway

By JUDY BACA
For The Sunday Edition

BRIDGEPORT - Do not say "No" to Shallyn. By the time she was in seventh grade, the 1984 Upper Merion Area High School graduate knew she wanted a career in the fashion world and she has wavered very little since.

Now known by only her given name, Shallyn will host a preview of her Univest Collection, "Worn Out!" for the press and retailers on Friday, Feb. 13, with a trunk show, open to everyone, on Saturday, March 6, from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. The festivities will all take place at the showroom on the ground floor of the Shallyn Building, 114 DeKalb St., Bridgeport.

Describing the focus of the collection as the "New Jacket" for next fall, the business owner listed tapestries, leather, suede and denim as the fabrics used to create the "simple accessory" designed for both women and men. She plans to market the vest in high end specialty stores throughout the Philadelphia area, as well as in Delaware, New Jersey and Maryland, where the company has started garnering recognition.

"We are working to get them into shops such as Toby Lerner, Elle and Cindy Woodrow for the fall," she announced.

Shallyn noted that her family moved to the King of Prussia area when she was 7 and she began sewing when she had her first home economics class in seventh grade.

"My mother bought me my first sewing machine when I was in seven grade," she recalled. "Then I kept taking home economics and it parlayed from there."

But it hasn't been easy.

"People kept telling me I didn't have the talent," declared Shallyn, who went on from Upper Merion to receive a bachelor of science degree at the former Philadelphia College of Textiles and Science (now Philadelphia University).

"All the way through high school and college I was told to do something different. But I was always told by people who also said they loved what I was wearing and that I always looked so nice."

She started her own line in 1990, working from a 200-square-foot studio in Devon. In 1991, she was presented the Entrepreneur Award from the City of Philadelphia when she had six productions from Washington, D.C. to New York.

Determined to keep her business in this area, Shallyn said, "The apparel business used to be very important in the Philadelphia area and, unfortunately, a lot of companies moved away. So I always wanted to open an apparel business in this area. There are so many apparel workers no longer employed who need jobs."

With the business and designing centered in Bridgeport and the clothing

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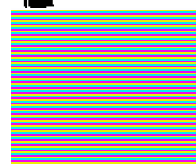
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manufacturing done in Philadelphia, Shallyn said, "We are trying to keep everything in this area because it's such a lost industry here and we want to bring it back."

But getting funding was something else so, while she continued to work toward her goal, Shallyn said she held a total of no less than 38 different jobs along the way.

"I did everything from working as an order taker at Domino's Pizza to working in production at Chilton Publishing," she detailed. "I worked at temporary agencies and as a clerk in department stores. I was even a teacher in a private school.

"All the time, I was sketching, sewing and doing fashion productions from Philadelphia to Washington, D.C., to see if there was interest in the clothing. I was really doing marketing research."

The Shallyn Building opened in 2000 and employs 12 in its upstairs offices. In addition, Shallyn hires models for runway shows, print and special appearances.

"We hire our own models," she said. "We have fashion model searches twice a year and we have collection previews twice a year to present the collection to the industry, the press, the retailers and consumers." Adding that she also has a background in dance, she said she acts as choreographer for the show models.

The company has another collection, labeled Progressive ClubWEAR, which will be shown next year.

"We have four divisions in Progressive ClubWEAR," Shallyn explained. "We describe the collection as clubwear clothing that socializes the way we live."

Currently, that collection is made up of ensembles, which range from casual to dressy, for women. The designer expects to move into a men's ClubWEAR division in the future.

Calling her detour into 38 different jobs "an education" which helped her establish the "concept and collections the way I wanted the company to be as well as the branding, the labor, etc.," Shallyn continued, "We are now starting to get the collections into retail stores."

Promising a good time and good food for all who attend her upcoming shows, Shallyn said, "I think people will be surprised to see this showroom looking like a New York runway. We are expecting people from New York, Delaware and Maryland, as well as Philadelphia."

Crediting her family as being "very supportive," Shallyn said, "I once gave up for about eight months but I guess when God has something for you, you are pushed back into it and that's what happened to me. It's all our faith and knowing God does things to the upteenth degree."

Admission to the Shallyn March 6 Trunk Show is free but tickets are required and may be obtained via the company's Web site, www.eSHALLYN.com. For more information, call (610) 239-7550.

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