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## Local Resident Creates Fashion out of Plastic Bags

By Moya Stone



Malak Shoukry with a selection of her products  
Photo Andy Scheck

Moraga resident Malak Shoukry is likely to set a new trend in fashion with her line of accessories made from recycled plastic bags. Using a crochet hook and a lot of imagination Shoukry turns those pesky unwanted shopping bags, newspaper bags, and produce bags into chic and practical fashion must-haves.

Shoukry's journey into accessories began a few years ago when, at the gym, she spotted a water bottle tucked into its own holder. The owner of the unusual-looking accessory told her the holder was crocheted out of plastic bags. Shoukry was immediately intrigued. "I really liked the idea of reusing plastics bags," she says. Originally from Egypt, Shoukry is horrified every time she visits her homeland and sees the abundance of plastic bags floating and flying around in streams and on beaches. "I find them everywhere," she explains. "There is no recycling program in Egypt."

When she was 13-years-old, Shoukry learned how to crochet from her grandmother. Using her years of experience she set out to create her own plastic bag accessories. A full time researcher at Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory, Shoukry worked in her spare time figuring out the best way to cut the plastic bags to make yarn and how to construct various accessory shapes. She showed her first attempt to her coworkers, who promptly encouraged Shoukry to start hitting the craft fairs.

That was in 2009 and since then Shoukry has been making and selling her line of accessories including lunch bags, handbags, water bottle holders, hats, and flip flops. Each piece is embellished with flowers and unique buttons Shoukry finds at craft shops. She says she's having fun. "I have come to really enjoy the process, choosing the color combinations and designs." Friends and co-workers provide Shoukry with "clean bags only," as she is quick to point out.

Beyond the fun and challenge of making the accessories, Shoukry is very happy to donate all the proceeds to two organizations in Egypt. Fat'hel Kheir and Alwan wa Awtar are non-government and non-profit organizations that provide micro-loans and educate impoverished women and children. One day when she's retired, Shoukry hopes to go back to Egypt and teach women her craft so they can not only start their own small businesses but also learn about recycling and put the all those unsightly plastic bags to good use.

Shoukry does two to three craft fairs a year where her work is a big hit with everyone, especially teens who really appreciate the recycle factor. She also maintains a website where her creations can be viewed ([www.MyGreenCrochet.com](http://www.MyGreenCrochet.com)).

Shoukry says she feels lucky to have found a project that combines her crocheting skills with a way to improve the world. "I wanted to do something to help people and I thank God for showing me the way."

Moya Stone is a local journalist who specializes in fashion and writes her own blog - [OverDressedforLife.com](http://OverDressedforLife.com).

Reach the reporter at: [info@lamorindaweekly.com](mailto:info@lamorindaweekly.com)

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