

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'het 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).

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.

Helping Loved Ones Age Gracefully:

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Above all, make sure you and your loved ones have written wills and advance care directives in place. According to "Advance Directives and Advance Care Planning," a 2008 report from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, only 18 to 36 percent of adults have, historically, completed advance directives, and those "with serious medical conditions, a group for whom advance directives are particularly relevant, have completed advance directives at only a slightly higher rate. In spite of widespread efforts to promote

advance care planning and advance directives, most end-of-life decisions emerge from the interactions of individuals, family members, and doctors, without formal advance care planning processes or advance directive documents."

Children may not think of parents, aunts or uncles, or grandparents as aging – but they are. Planning early helps everyone ensure that family members' last years together will be the best they can be.

Jones suggests starting the dialogue soon with: "I know it's great right now...."

Senior Health and General Advocacy Resources

- Advance Care Planning Conversation Guide – Coalition for Compassionate Care California: <http://coalitionccc.org/advance-health-planning.php>
- Assisted Living Community Evaluation Checklist – Assisted Living Federation of America: http://www.alfa.org/alfa/Checklist_for_Evaluating_Communities.asp
- Home Away from Home: Relocating Your Parents – Family Caregiver Alliance: http://www.caregiver.org/caregiver/jsp/content_node.jsp?nodeid=849
- National Institute on Aging:
 - Elder Abuse: www.nia.nih.gov/health/publication/elder-abuse
 - Falls and Fractures: www.nia.nih.gov/health/publication/falls-and-fractures
 - So Far Away: Twenty Questions and Answers About Long-Distance Caregiving: www.nia.nih.gov/health/publication/so-far-away-twenty-questions-and-answers-about-long-distance-caregiving-0
 - Talking with Your Doctor: A Guide for Older People: www.nia.nih.gov/health/publication/talking-your-doctor-guide-older-people

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with Valerie Watase, PT, and Esther Wetzel, Certified Pilates Instructor & Senior Fitness Specialist

JULY 31: Shoulder Injuries and Prevention in Athletes
with Carrie Haraburda, PT

AUG 28: Running Injuries and Prevention
with Lisa Gibson, PT

SEPT 25: Nutrition for Healing
with guest speaker, Cynthia Allen, Registered Nurse, B.S. Nutrition, & Natural Chef of New Start Nutrition & Wellness

OCT 30: The Core: Stabilization vs. Strength and How Pilates Can Help
with Ashley Berry, Certified Pilates Instructor & Personal Trainer

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