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Sewnow Fashion Studio Celebrates 10 Years of Cultivating Creativity

By A.K. Carroll



Sewnow participants show off designs from the fashion studio's summer camp program during a fashion show last year in Lafayette. Photo provided

young girls' desires. Looking for a part-time endeavor that would meet the needs of the community and utilize her expertise, Goldie began laying the groundwork for Sewnow - a designer studio workspace stocked with the latest machines, materials and patterns, as well as instructors who are ready to help you custom-create anything you dream up. Located in Lafayette on Golden Gate Way across from the theater, it's just the sort of place where the younger Goldie may have visited.

In addition to offering year-round fashion design and sewing classes, specialty workshops, community service events and private sewing lessons, Sewnow also offers summer camps for beginners and experts alike.

"Summer camp is our most popular, energetic and fun product that we offer," says Goldie. "It's been steadily growing since we started [10 years ago]."

The weeklong program offers full-day and half-day options with morning session from 9 a.m. to noon and afternoon sessions from 1 to 4 p.m. Juniors programs are available for designers as young as second and third grade, though the average age is 12.

Previously summer programs were divided by skill level, which posed a problem when campers came with friends of varying skill levels. But thanks to FashionKit, a digital product that offers a broad selection of customizable patterns and projects, along with online instructions, campers can work on projects that fit their individual skill levels and preferences.

"It opens the door for everyone to work on projects that they're interested in, which might be different from others in their group," explains Goldie. "Everyone has access to instructions on iPads and computers. You can take all of that learning home from camp and continue on at home."

It started at a flea market outside of Toronto. Canada native and Lafayette resident Susan Goldie, then 10 years old, was snooping through the stalls with her parents when she happened upon an old sewing machine that would set the trajectory for her future.

"I bought it with my pocket money," Goldie recalls. "And it really opened the door. I loved that experience of creating with my hands something that I was really proud of." At a time when online instruction wasn't readily available, Goldie was primarily self-taught. She went on to attend fashion school in Montreal and worked in costume and design for 15 years before taking time off to raise her two sons.

Even during her leave of absence, Goldie was never far from the world of fashion. "A lot of my friends who had girls came to me and asked to learn to sew," says Goldie. She could identify with the

Newbies start with Fashion Kit 101, which Goldie describes as a "sewing machine boot camp" that prepares them for the more advanced projects available in Fashion Kit Camp.

Camps are led by a team of four to five instructors and a group of studio assistants, many of whom are former campers themselves. Goldie aims to maintain a 1:7 ratio between instructors and campers, to ensure accessibility.

Anjelica Sauerwein, who holds an associate's degree in product development and a bachelor's degree in business management from San Francisco's FIDM (Fashion Institute of Design and Merchandising), currently works as a lead instructor at Sewnow.

"I've always drawn and been creative my whole life," says Sauerwein. "My mom taught me to sew [at 8 years old] and I took it from there."

When Sauerwein saw an ad for a Sewnow camp instructor four years ago, it seemed ideal. "I thought 'I could totally teach kids how to sew,'" recalls Sauerwein. "'That'd be super fun,' and it has been."

She has especially enjoyed seeing her students grow and develop their skills as they come back class after class and year after year. "I usually have a great relationship with my students," says Sauerwein. "We're like a little family in there."

Goldie agrees. "What's really nice is making new friends at camp," she says. "If it's an area you're really excited about, your regular friends may not have the same level of interest. It's really nice to see kids find their people."

Seventh-grader Ainsley Woodford started at Sewnow when she was 9 years old. "I just really wanted to start sewing and it was the closest place and seemed like a lot of fun," says Woodford. Her favorite projects include a quilt and a hooded cardigan she made using FashionKit. Woodford is looking forward to this summer, when she can work on multiple projects at once. "I think it's a really fun thing and a really cool experience to have."

Early registration for summer camp is open now. "There's lots of space left, but we advise families to sign up ASAP for specific dates," says Goldie, noting that most of the camps do fill up by the start of summer.

At the end of each summer, Sewnow puts on a summer fashion show at the Community Learning Center. "The kids walk the runway in the outfits they've made. It's a nice way to culminate the end of the summer and something fun for all of us," says Goldie.

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