

An artist at the sewing machine--Vacaville teen aspires to be a fashion designer or teacher

By Amy Maginnis-Honey

VACAVILLE -- While most high school girls are busy with back-to-school shopping, Kasey Kuchinski, 17, has created her own vintage T-shirt and is working on other sewing projects.

Kasey, who will be a junior at Vacaville Christian High School, began sewing when she was in fifth grade.

"I always wanted to learn how to sew," she said. The desire probably stems back to when she sat in the family attic and cut up her mom's shirts and made doll dresses. She found a class in Suisun City taught by Catharine Anderson and made a sewing bag at the first lesson.



Many of Anderson's students are in junior high. "They want to be different from their friends," Anderson said of the reason many try sewing. "They like shopping for clothes but they also like to have something unique."

"Sewing also instills patience," Anderson noted. "They learn things that are worth something are not always instantaneous."

The only thing that keeps Kasey from sewing the hours away is the fact she doesn't have a sewing machine at home. Her work is done at Anderson's sewing school in the Marina Center. Kasey spends four hours there each Saturday and sometimes goes during the week.

However, finding free time is a challenge as Kasey maintains good grades in addition to violin lessons, youth group at Covenant Community Church and the school's drama club.

"She's very creative. She really likes crafts," said Kasey's mother Chris Kuchinski. Father Ron Kuchinski taught ceramics for many years. Older sister Kelly Kuchinski is majoring in interior architecture while younger sister Kayla Kuchinski focuses on painting. Chris Kuchinski's art is teaching French.

This year's Dixon May Fair, Kasey came home with a trophy for Best of Show for the winter prom dress she fashioned. Kasey estimated she spent about \$90 to make it. The year before she purchased a dress that cost about \$200. "I stuck out like a sore thumb," Kasey said of the prom, with a smile. "All my friends were in black." Kasey's dress is sage green with an ivory bodice and red ribbon (as seen in the photograph).

She frequents Hancock Fabrics in Vacaville. "I go and look at the patterns and decide, 'I guess I could make that,'" she said. Currently she's working on a Renaissance-style dress and some curtains for her aunt. "I don't really sew for others that much," she said. She keeps everything she sews, jokingly adding, "no one else will have it." Actually, Kasey likes to keep her own handiwork. "I really don't like when people have my stuff," she said. However, she did make a quilted wall hanging of the Declaration of Independence for a teacher at school.

Over the summer she went on a church youth group mission to Mexico. The teens helped build two houses for the Oaxacan Indians. They now have homemade curtains in the window, thanks to Kasey. She had to alter them to fit the windows. Fortunately there was a sewing machine in the village. "It must have been 20,000 years old," Kasey said of the machine. She won't forget the little boy who looked up at her work and said, "bonita," which means pretty.

Kasey and other youth at Anderson's sewing school have also made hats and scarves given to the local homeless. Such generosity is common of teen seamstresses, said Karen Kozar, publicist for the Home Sewing Association. She sees an increase in teens taking up the art. "Technology has come to the forefront in sewing," she said. "There are a variety of machines that can do everything. "They work similar to a home personal computer. They just download the software." Sewing, she added, gives the teen a chance to express their own style. "It's a great way for teens to stand out while still sitting in the crowd," Kozar said. And, for those who don't believe the teen sewed it, Kozar feels that's a great boost to the teen's self-esteem to make something so close to an item purchased from a store.

Amy Maginnis-Honey can be reached at amaginnis@dailyrepublic.net.
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