

Conscience friendly fashion walks Runway

Published: Monday, September 14, 2009

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Latham Life - SUPPLEMENT TO TROY RECORD - COVER STORY WITH PHOTOS - WEB VERSION BELOW

LATHAM—Susan Bonneau is a busy woman. With a 12 year old daughter, a day job and as the proprietor of the new store, Runway 7 Eco Fashions, it's almost amazing how calm her demeanor is. Runway, which held its grand opening earlier this month, is a store for those who like fashion and are also careful what goes on their bodies and into the environment.

While the store's motto is "passion for sustainable fashion," it wasn't started as strictly an environmental endeavor for Bonneau; it was also because of her health. After having been diagnosed with lupus, she was disappointed and upset for a few reasons.

"One, I couldn't go in the sun anymore," the proprietor said. "I had to wear protective clothing or at least long sleeves and pants. I'm [also] into fashion. I still wanted to look fashionable and [the options] out there aren't fashionable."

For Bonneau, this was an insult to injury situation. Having this disease and not being able to find clothing she liked prompted her to do more research; "I came up with some great clothes!" she said.

During her 18 year tenure working in a dental office, the new business owner said she never had the drive to open her own store. "I thought I was in dental until death," she said. "This was just a little vision that came about in 2006 when I was starting to get a little depressed about availability of clothing for me."

Not being able to find what she was looking for locally, the internet proved little help when it came to finding clothing. "Everything I did buy was on the internet so I couldn't touch it [or] try it on," she said. "Most of it I had to send back and with undergarments I couldn't so I was stuck with things I wasn't happy with."

The internet did prove helpful in another way for Bonneau, though, by helping her find vendors for Runway. "Basically [the research] was all internet and several phone calls," she recounts. "I just called the companies and I had them send me information on how they got started, their background and if there were any other local companies who carried the same product."

Wanting to stand out in the community, Bonneau aimed to carry product lines that weren't available in the capital region. More specifically though, she was looking for companies that "were fair trade and environmentally friendly. I was looking for smaller businesses; I think there's better customer service when [the company] is yours."

Quality of product and pricing were also very important, especially for the area. About pricing she said "there are a lot of companies out there, but we're not in New York City so I had to go with a happy medium."

In a world where people are becoming more "green conscious," clothing isn't often at the top of list of things to change. We hear about cars and appliances, but rarely t-shirts. Bonneau offers two reasons we should be more careful of the clothing we choose: sun protection and toxins.

"People are concerned with what makeup and perfume they wear, but they're not realizing that anything that touches your skin is absorbed," she said. "Traditional clothing is processed with tons and tons of toxins. The

chemicals they use ends up in our water supply.” For those looking for sun protection, Runway carries a line called Coolibar.

It was in doing research on lupus that led her to the information about toxins. Though the disease is supposed to be genetic, Bonneau is the first person in her family to have it; after researching causes of the chronic autoimmune disease she found the biggest cause is toxins in the body.

Before changing her clothing, she made other changes with the products she was using. “I went to organic makeup [and] food, anything that became internal,” she said. After developing severe rashes that wouldn’t go away, her doctors were prescribing her medication and steroid creams. However, she said, “I was resistant because as far as I’m concerned, I’m adding even more toxins to my body when I feel that could be my root cause of problem.”

With prescriptions that were merely covering up the symptoms, not dealing with the disease directly, Bonneau decided to go a little further with the changes she was making. “That’s when I decided OK I need to go a little further and I thought about clothing. Every day I get up and put items on and my body is absorbing additional toxins,” she said.

The change in clothing, she said, has been a tremendous help; her proof remains in the fact that she hasn’t used a steroid cream for a year and a half.

While those with lupus will undoubtedly find respite with the products – which includes clothing for men and women, accessories, undergarments and shoes – the store is for the community at large to enjoy.

Bonneau considers the store’s opening frightening and exhausting but is hopeful for its future. “I still have hope that this is needed and I think people will see a value and start to understand that we need to take care of our environment because no one else is going to.”

Runway 7 Eco Fashions is located in the Peter Harris Plaza at 952 Troy-Schenectady Road in Latham. For more information visit them online at www.runway7ecofashions.com or call 783-2660. Hours are Monday – Friday 10 to 8, Saturday 11 to 6 and Sunday 11 to 5.z