

Needlewomen

Sew unique, sew chic – Sew Dayton

By JENNIFER HANAUER LUMPKIN



[l to r] Tracy McElfresh and Jesy Anderson at Sew Dayton. Photo credit: Mughshot Studios

It's just lying there. Draped casually, yet somehow dauntingly, over the back of a dining room chair. It's The Mending Pile, and you'd just as soon chuck the whole lot into the bin behind Salvation Army than deal with the hemming, patching, darning and button-replacing that stands between you and your ability to again wear your favorite pair of pants out into a public space. Maybe this wariness stems from the lack of a certain set of domestic skills. Maybe it's the threat of tedium that clings to the back of so many solitary household tasks. Maybe you simply don't have the time to embark on the odyssey that is a trip to the strip mall to obtain the one needle you need to mend them all. The time has come to cast all trepidation aside! Sew Dayton in the Historic Oregon District has everything you need to whittle away that mound of mending, be it lessons or camaraderie or just a damn needle. Outfitted with smiles, quality product and vast stores of knowledge, the merry seamstresses of Sew Dayton are here to help you learn new skills, repair beloved pieces and realize your own vision.

Sew Dayton co-founder Tracy McElfresh was running a dress-making business out of her home when she met fellow co-founder Jesy Anderson. Anderson, who was also running her own business, was in need of a wedding gown. Together they created a one-of-a-kind dress for Anderson's nuptials and an innovative bond between the two was formed. When they realized how many trips they were



Students at a Sew Dayton class; Photo credit: JKessel Design

"We wanted to fill a niche and be something that nothing else had in Dayton"

- Tracy McElfresh of Sew Dayton

making out of town to acquire the supplies needed for their respective businesses due to Dayton's relative lack of sewing resources, McElfresh and Anderson applied to Activated Spaces, Dayton's pop-up shop program. "We wanted to fill a niche and be something that nothing else had in Dayton," said McElfresh. The duo obtained the space adjacent to the Color of Energy Gallery and has since signed a longer lease to keep their successful business going. "Eventually, we will need to grow into a bigger spot, but for now this is perfect for us," said McElfresh.

Getting started, the two some garnered the knowledge of their community by starting a Women Business Owners group as a way of sharing information. "That was the missing part," said McElfresh of when she ran a business on her own. "We pulled in other women

that were strong, women whom we could model ourselves after. They've all been very supportive."

McElfresh and Anderson realized that to build a successful business, they would need to expand beyond their talents for dressmaking and design and develop a clientele for classes and alterations. "My true passion is just making dresses, and if I could just do that alone, that would be wonderful, but it's seasonal," said McElfresh.

"My learning curve has been in alterations," said Anderson. "I really didn't do alterations before. Now it's part of the business, so you have to learn what you can. If I wanted to make money, I had to learn it and not be afraid of it."

Another contributing factor to their early success is their attention to the needs of their customers. The women have experience with this from both a consuming and producing standpoint and so they knew this would be essential from the beginning.

"One of the things I've noticed, having worked in the fabric industry for eight years, is that it's really hard to find good customer service. There's a lot of 'I don't know' instead of 'Let me find out for you,'" said McElfresh. "We try to make sure that we get all of the information that we can for people that come in when they're here," added Anderson.

As a small business, these ladies don many a hat as they quarry their way from week to week. "There are emails, the phone is ringing, sometimes on both lines, a lot of it is just questions needing to be answered. You're your marketing person, your bank account person, your accounting person, you're wearing ALL of the hats and then you're coming in and cleaning the bathroom," said McElfresh. "We're selling fabrics, selling patterns, giving classes and making stuff and doing alterations, too. But in our minds we figured that was the only way that we were going to be sustainable, if we did as many things as possible."

McElfresh and Anderson hope to not

only sustain but to also grow, so all of their profit is poured directly back into the shop. "We started debt-free and we're still debt-free," said McElfresh. "You take everything you earn and put it right back in. It does work, but you have to start small."

Of course, it's not all about monetary gain. "We try to treat people like family and get to know the community and get to know people," said McElfresh. "We're not just here to make money. We're here to be part of the community."





Dresses for sale at Sew Dayton; photo credit: Jennifer Hanauer Lumpkin

Sew Dayton is located at 16 E. Brown St. in the Oregon District, adjacent to the Color of Energy Gallery. Their operating hours are Tuesday through Saturday from 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. For class schedules and more information, visit sewdayton.com or call 937.234.7398.



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