

Girls learn sewing skills with Designing Cinderella

By Leslie Mitts
Spilyay Tymoo

Surrounded by pins and fabric, a group of local young women can often be found hard at work on Sunday afternoons.

A room in the education building features several girls surrounded by purple mannequins as they carefully measure and cut in order to complete items of their own design.

"Designing Cinderella" is a new program that is helping girls learn to sew their own prom dresses—in addition to other items.

While the program originally targeted high school girls looking to create their own prom dress, several younger community members have also joined the group with a desire to learn sewing skills.

Brenda Williams is teaching the group of girls after deciding to share her knowledge of sewing and design years ago.

The inspiration for the group came to her after she began to wonder what girls do when they can't afford to purchase their own prom dresses.

After a friend suggested that she start a group to teach young girls to sew, Williams said, it made sense for her to do exactly that.

Having learned to sew during childhood, Williams knew she had the knowledge to teach that type of course.

"I've been making garments, and in particular gowns, since I was 12 or 13," Williams said. "I made my sister's prom dress."

However, when she tried to find funding for a course Williams discovered that her lack of education created a significant roadblock.

For that reason, Williams decided to continue her education



Leslie Mitts/Spilyay

Victoria Katchia works on the pattern for her latest project: a girl's Easter dress.

and spent over two years commuting between Seattle, where she was living, and Los Angeles to study at a design institute.

"At the time I was a single mother of three kids," Williams said, and didn't want to uproot her family in order to obtain an education.

While the constant traveling was tough, Williams said, "I was that determined to get a degree."

After completing her education Williams moved to Warm Springs and later approached the 4-H program with her idea.

"It just ended up perfect," Williams said.

The sewing program is being funded by the Johnson O'Malley grant and there have been about nine full-time participants, Williams said.

Because of the grant, she added, they have been able to purchase sewing kits and mannequins for all of the girls to use.

The supplies definitely help the girls to learn things correctly, Williams said. Right now, she added, "They're learning the way of making patterns the professional way."

Though some participants haven't been able to attend every Sunday, everyone is welcome to work at their own speed. "The nice thing about it is that everybody helps everybody catch up," Williams said. "Everybody works at kind of their own pace."

Currently the group is working on sewing girl's Easter dresses in order to learn the necessary

skills of dress design.

While they do plan to move onto fancier dresses and other garments, Williams said, "They need the basics of learning how to sew and learning how to design before they can do that."

Kortney Stacona, 11, joined the group for one simple reason: "I wanted to know how to sew," she explained.

As for her favorite part of the group, Stacona said, "Probably making the outfits—I like to draw."

"I've learned a lot about making patterns," Stacona added, and has already completed a few pillows.

"We use them for our couch now," she said.

Miriam "Minnie" Vance, 13, joined the group in part because her mother is instructing it.

"It's really fun to be able to spend time with my mom," Vance said, and she also enjoys learning how to sew and make things for herself.

"I think it will end up being a good skill to just have," Vance explained.

Plus, Vance added, she's seen her mother making items for

years and plans to use her skills as much as possible.

"That would be fun to make like Christmas presents and stuff," she said.

Victoria Katchia, 18, is one young woman who plans to use the sewing group to make a prom dress this spring.

For her the group will be particularly helpful, because according to Katchia, shopping for a dress would have been particularly tiresome.

"I'm not really much of a shopper," she explained.

She's grown up surrounded by people sewing and doing other projects, Katchia said, from her mother working on craft projects to making moccasins with her grandmother.

In fact, Katchia has sewn in the past and made quilts and other items.

She plans to continue sewing and hopes to be able to make her own items in the future.

It should also prove to be economical when she attends college in the fall, Katchia said.

She's hoping to attend the Oregon Institute of Technology, and said, "Saving money in

anyway possible would probably be a good thing."

Williams hopes to continue the program as long as possible, but it all depends on funding, she said.

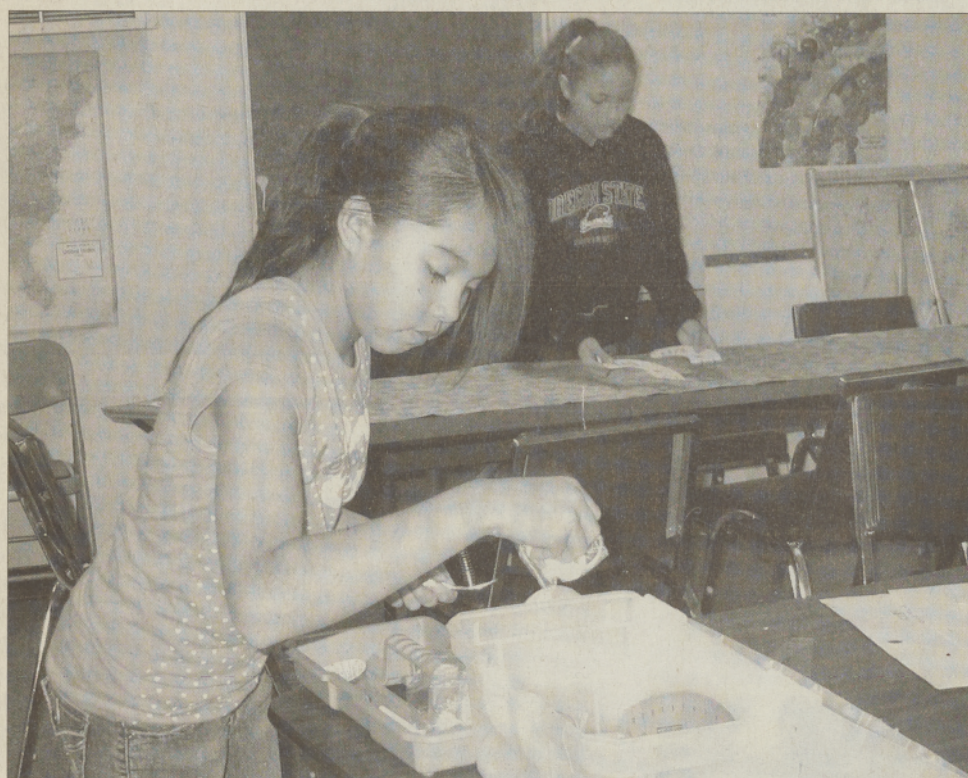
"I could not have done it without the tribes and Culture and Heritage, who allows me to use their space and their sewing machines," Williams added, and also credited the OSU extension and 4-H programs with the group's success.

In fact, Williams hopes to be able to expand the program and create an additional sewing group, which she plans to call "Project Runway on the Rez."

Based on the popular television show, Williams said the group would give community members the opportunity to create not just prom dresses but a whole collection of garments.

However, that program would also need additional support.

"It just depends on whether I can find the funding for it or not," Williams said. As for Designing Cinderella, the group will be showcasing their finished gowns later this spring.



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Kortney Stacona (left) and Minnie Vance each plan to continue to use their sewing skills.

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