

Costume couture

By Cheryl Allison

For Radnor Township's Sandy Boyd, finding an original, well-made Halloween costume for her daughter used to be a real trick.

Now she's turning her dilemma into a business that could provide a very special treat for other families.

In 2004, Boyd, of Newtown Square, launched Heirloom Designs, offering custom-made costumes that she said could be better described as "high-quality wearable art for your child."

Crafted out of silks and satins and yard upon yard of frothy tulle, sparkling with hand-sewn crystal beads, her Glinda the Good Witch and Princess Bride aren't just the stuff of little girls' dreams, but "collectible pieces of art."

It all started when Boyd, a self-taught seamstress, went shopping for a costume for now 5-year-old daughter Marion's first Halloween.

"I got frustrated, going to the stores, looking at costumes," she said. She found the fabrics cheap, the designs uninspired.

Boyd's education is in chemistry. Her career is in consulting on business development for the chemicals industry. She had never taken so much as a home ec class, but she had taught herself to sew in the late 1980s.

"I started making suits for work. I had to attend a lot of black-tie events," she said.

Her first costume attempt was a butterfly, using a store-bought pattern. But over the last few years, she began researching and creating her own designs, finding inspiration in different historical periods and among different characters.

Designing and sewing the costumes became a hobby after she left her corporate job and started consulting in 2001. "I like to put things together," she explained. Boyd delighted in searching out couture-quality fabrics and trims in Philadelphia and New



Sandy Boyd is a self-taught seamstress, creating custom-made costumes for children.

York. "I take a vision of how I want it to look, source it out, and pull it all together."

Still, she might have continued creating splendid dress-up outfits for her own little girl until she and Marion went to New York City last Halloween morning and ended up being selected to appear on "Good Morning America."

While she was there, "A Manhattan mom asked me where she could get one" of the Glinda costumes, and "A light went off in my head."

Over the last year, Boyd has created eight designs, working up a new one "every couple of months." She started a Web site, www.heirloomdesigns.com, and is ready to take orders, either for one of the existing designs or custom tailored to a customer's idea. "The sky's the limit," she said.

So far, Boyd's designs are all geared to girls, although she said she'd be glad to design a boy's costume if requested. She's focusing on ages 2 to 7, but will consider ages up to adult.

Because each costume is made out of high-quality fabrics and requires extensive handwork, the prices will also be higher-end - from about \$200 to \$1,000. In that range, she sees her market as sports figures' and other celebrities' children.

But Boyd emphasizes that her creations are intended for different special occasions. "They could be used for portraits, theme parties. They're not just for Halloween."

When Boyd sets out to design a costume, she first spends a lot of time researching the particular period or character. For Glinda, from *The Wizard of Oz*, "I must have watched the movie 10 times. I did a lot of searching on the Web for images," she recalled.

The same goes for her Queen Elizabeth I, a majestic gown of brocade and gold pintuck shantung, complete with lace organza ruff, or her current project, a 1700s French Marie Antoinette-style gown to be done with underskirt of rich purple velvet and overskirt of iridescent double-weave taffeta.

See **COSTUME**, Page 10

Little Red Riding Hood



Glinda the Good Witch



Flower Fairy



Main Line Life photos by PETE BANNAN

Life sounds

By Sally Friedman Columnist



Our friends in North Jersey are about to enter the world of empty nesters. Their baby bird - the last of four - flies off to college next fall, and they are feeling as ambivalent about this monumental change in their lives as we did some years ago.

So on a recent evening, when we spent some time together critiquing the latest movies, wondering about health-care reform and lamenting the state of the world as longtime friends sometimes do, it was inevitable that the subject of the last kid leaving home surfaced. How we became "experts" I'll never

Veteran empty nesters drop egg of advice to novice couple

know, but there we were, offering whatever wisdom we have to these new initiates.

We told them about the first chapter first, the autumn when Jill, our firstborn, left us standing amazed, anxious and altogether overwhelmed on a grassy college quad. She was fine - we were clearly not.

That was the toughest one, that first. That was the leave-taking that whispered that our parenting days were numbered, and that soon enough - probably before we were ready - it would be Amy's turn, then Nancy's.

That instinct was, of course, altogether right.

And I couldn't tell our old friends the whole truth, that as long as we live, we would never, ever forget the moment when we willed our arms to disengage from Nancy, our baby, and then watched her walk away into an ivy-covered college dormitory.

For us, it was a leap into another cosmos.

So we chose the details selectively: I chose not to describe how I sobbed when we finally got home after that miserable, silent ride through three states and I saw Nancy's empty room.

My husband, I noticed, did not mention to these soon-to-be empty nest comrades that we have never quite grown accustomed to the noise of absence, a stillness that slides along the walls of our house to this day.

"It's really different without the kids," I did say in a voice I hope was not husky with loss.

They surely don't need us to tell them that the rhythms change so drastically that you wonder how you'll ever readjust to life without homework, car pools and trips to the mall for jeans of a precise cut

and color that must be gotten before tomorrow's dawn breaks.

The very things you thought you'd never, ever miss are bafflingly yearned for in that initial period of shifting gears. I'd be hard-put to explain why.

In a moment of unadulterated honesty, we told our friends that, yes, even the best marriage partners feel vulnerable in this empty domestic landscape, suddenly facing one another across the kitchen table with no clamor of other, often urgent voices demanding time or attention. The sharp focus is sometimes a little blinding.

We lose the habit of speech for years on end when we are raising children, and the pathways back are surprisingly serpentine.

But here was the joyful news we

shared with our friends: There IS life after kids - full, wonderful, satisfying, relatively carefree life.

There is pleasure and fulfillment in refocusing, regrouping and remembering why you ever decided to have kids in the first place with that person across the breakfast room table.

You do derive warmth and pleasure from daily life, and it's incredibly sybaritic to dash off to see a movie without having to worry about anything or anyone.

That terrible stillness never vanishes, but it surely does subside. It's even welcome.

And we assured our nervous friends that at the exact moment that they start celebrating empty nesthood, a gypsy in blue jeans and sneakers will be at the kitchen door to announce that she's back, and that while she (ahem) "finds herself," she'll be living at home again.

Frankly, that's when the empty nest starts looking awfully good.

COSTUMES: Kids' couture

From Page 9

Her Wicked Witch is the match of Glinda, built of layers of black satin and tulle, hand sewn with hundreds of Swarovsky crystals, and with a flowing chiffon scarf trailing from the traditional pointed black hat.

Her Flower Fairy and Little Red Riding Hood, again, draw details from literature and illustrations.

In coming up with new designs, "I don't try to focus as much on originality as on authenticity," Boyd said. "I try to go a little deeper than the mass-produced [costumes], ... a little deeper into the character I'm trying to portray."

She also gets some expert advice. "I get marketing input from my daughter and her

friends," she noted.

Boyd considered ways to produce her costumes in more quantity and at lower cost. She even went so far as to send one of the designs abroad to have a merchandising sample made up, but was disappointed in the quality. "If someone wants to order 10 or 20, I have a contractor in Philadelphia who can make them," she said.

For now, though, Boyd is looking forward to sewing her designs one at a time, working with customers to create their own dream costumes and family treasures.

Yes, it may cost more. But, as she points out, "You're only a child once."

For information on Heirloom Designs, visit the Web site or call 610-353-6846.



VIVACIOUS VIOLINS.

Beginning violinists perform new tunes at Main Line School Night. Musicians include Ron Rappeport of Narberth, Al Wright of Haverford, Jennifer Furness of Narberth, Queneice Maranan of Ardmore, Bernice Tucker of Bryn Mawr and Bridge Baines of Devon. Beginning Violin and Beyond is just one of 30 music and instrumental classes offered this fall through School Night, including banjo, bagpipes, guitar, harmonica, saxophone and trumpet. Registration is available online at www.mainlineschoolnight.org or by calling 610-687-4517.

HEALTH CALENDAR

Oct. 14.

"Diabetes and You" health education talk for senior citizens. 2:30 p.m. at Main Line Adult Day Center, 119 Radnor St., Bryn Mawr. Alicia Somer, R.N., is the speaker. Free. 610-527-4200.

Oct. 15

Stretch Your Limits: Strength/flexibility training for adults older than 55. 12:15-1:15 p.m. at Bryn Mawr Hospital, Clothier Building auditorium, 130 S. Bryn Mawr Ave. \$5 per class (pay as you go); \$8 resistance tube; \$6 Premier Years members. 610-526-3760.

Oct. 16

"Empowering Our Community with Resources in 2004" event. 11 a.m.-3 p.m. at the Senior Citizens Center of Ardmore, 117 Ardmore Ave. Many agencies representing Montgomery County and the Lower Merion community will be available with information, giveaways, food and fun. For all ages. Free. No registration required. The program is FREE and for everyone — no matter what their age. No registration is required.

Adult and pediatric CPR. 10 a.m.-4 p.m. in the Medical Office Building, Conference Center, Delaware County Memorial Hospital. Curriculum testing will include the adult one-rescue CPR module, the pediatric CPR module and the adult and pediatric obstructed airway modules. The course is for lay persons with a specific interest in pediatric CPR. Training and standards are by the American Heart Association. \$50 per participant; \$75 per couple. Preregistration required. 610-284-8158.

Oct. 20

Stretch Your Limits: Strength/flexibility training for adults older than 55. 3-4 p.m. at Bryn Mawr Hospital, Clothier Building auditorium, 130 S. Bryn Mawr Ave. \$5 per class (pay as you go); \$8 resistance tube; \$6 Premier Years members. 610-526-3760.

Oct. 27

Heartsaver CPR program. 6 p.m.-10 p.m. in the Medical Office Building, Conference Center,

Delaware County Memorial Hospital. Includes discussions on prevention, risk factors and signs and symptoms of heart disease as well as practice of one-rescue CPR for the adult on a manikin. First Aid for choking will also be covered. Training and standards are by the American Heart Association. Certification requires successful completion of skills on a manikin. \$40. Preregistration required. 610-284-8158.

Stretch Your Limits: Strength/flexibility training for adults older than 55. 3-4 p.m. at Bryn Mawr Hospital, Clothier Building auditorium, 130 S. Bryn Mawr Ave. \$5 per class (pay as you go); \$8 resistance tube; \$6 Premier Years members. 610-526-3760.

Oct. 30

Hope on the Horizon: Living Beyond Breast Cancer's Stacy Goldstien Symposium on Breast Cancer. 8 a.m.-3 p.m. at Doubletree Hotel & Executive Meeting Center, Somerset, N.J. The day includes keynote presentations by Susan M. Love, M.D., M.B.A., and Raymond Chang, M.D., F.A.C.P., as well as several workshops. Preregistration is preferred, but walk-ins are welcome. \$35 for one; \$60 for two. Log on to www.lbbc.org or call 610-645-4567 for more information.

Nov. 5

Stretch Your Limits: Strength/flexibility training for adults older than 55. 12:15-1:15 p.m. at Bryn Mawr Hospital, Clothier Building auditorium, 130 S. Bryn Mawr Ave. \$5 per class (pay as you go); \$8 resistance tube; \$6 Premier Years members. 610-526-3760.

Nov. 10

Stretch Your Limits: Strength/flexibility training for adults older than 55. 3-4 p.m. at Bryn Mawr Hospital, Clothier Building auditorium, 130 S. Bryn Mawr Ave. \$5 per class (pay as you go); \$8 resistance tube; \$6 Premier Years members. 610-526-3760.



GOING GREEN. "Golf can be a very good catalyst for recovery because it provides a fun exercise in an invigorating outdoor environment," said Krista Eckard Beach, Bryn Mawr Rehab Hospital recreational therapist and organizer of the 14th Annual "Learn to Golf" Clinic at Rivercrest Golf Club and Preserve. The free clinic attracted about 30 physically challenged individuals, with an additional session for about 15 rehabilitation therapists in the morning. With her are (from left) instructors Bob Buck, executive director of the Eastern Amputee Golf Association and last year's Pennsylvania Amputee Open Champion; and Jamie Komanchek, PGA Professional at Rivercrest Golf Club and 1999 Assistant Professional of the Year.

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—The Scientist, 2003
- One of the 10 Best Places to Work
—Philadelphia Magazine, 2002
- 22 Physicians in "Top Docs" list
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