

Courier News

A GANNETT NEWSPAPER

SATURDAY, MAY 2, 2009

75 CENTS

Students to hit the runway in handmade creations

By MARK SPIVEY
Staff Writer

NORTH PLAINFIELD —

Odds can't be good that anyone will show up to the Chatham-based St. Patrick School's eighth-grade dance later this month looking more elegant than Cara Benevenia, donning a classically beautiful, flawlessly tailored sea green evening gown.

Odds are probably even worse that anyone else there will have actually designed and produced their own dress.

Cara, 13, of New Providence, is one of 30 area students ages 11-17 to participate in Project Fabricland, the annual youth program run out of the sewing school at the popular borough fabric store of the same name. Contestants competing in three age groups had their designs judged by a panel of three area fashion experts on Thursday before taking to the runway this morning at North Plainfield High School.

The program, based on the Bravo television show "Project Runway," has achieved unprecedented popularity in its third year, with aspiring designers from Somerset, Middle-



sex, Union and Morris counties participating in the required 12-course program that precedes the fashion show.

"It was a lot more work than I thought . . . I had a bit of a time crunch at the end," said Cara, donning her creation, which she said she chose over a store-bought piece to wear to her eighth-grade dance.

"I guess you can feel more beautiful in it," she said, "because you made it."

SPECIAL OCCASION: In celebration of Fabricland's 75th anniversary, this

year's theme for the program is "Make it Retro," with participants asked to take inspiration from fashion trends of a particular 20th-century era or decade. Contestants will appear on stage by decade, according to Fabricland owner Bruce Heyman, with 1920s-era flapper outfits segueing all the way through 1970s-era hippie garb. More than \$2,000 in Fabricland gift certificates and sewing prizes will be awarded to first-, second- and third-place winners in the three age groups, and all proceeds from the show are

being donated to The Leukemia & Lymphoma Society, a New York-based cancer research and education organization.

Judges graded pieces with scores from 1-10 in six categories, including retro look, use of fabrics and trims, fit, appropriateness for stated occasion or season, quality of sewing and construction, and design boards. The panel appeared impressed by Amanda Friedman, a junior at Ridge High School in Basking Ridge, who won first place in her age group last year and took third the year before.

IF YOU GO

WHAT: Third annual "Project Fabricland" fashion show, at which 30 students ages 11-17 will display outfits of their own design and creation through the North Plainfield-based Fabricland store's fashion education program.

WHEN: 10 a.m. today.

WHERE: North Plainfield High School, 34 Wilson Ave., North Plainfield.

HOW MUCH: \$10 at the door.

CONTACT INFO: www.fabricland.com, 908-755-4700.

Staff photo by Andrew Miller

Fabricland's Cathy Guterman, left, instructs contestants for "Project Fabricland" how to best show off their dresses at North Plainfield High School in North Plainfield on Thursday. Contestants competing in three age groups had their designs judged by a panel of three area fashion experts on Thursday before taking to the runway this morning at North Plainfield High School.

"I'm pretty pleased," Friedman, 17, said of her bright three-piece yellow and green design — inspired by a photo of legendary actress/model Lauren Bacall — that includes a cape, bustier and skirt. "I was inspired by the 1940s, pretty much with the change of roles among women," Friedman said. "That was when they really were no longer these stereotypical housewives anymore."

Parents and Fabricland officials alike said they believe the program has gained momentum due to a variety of reasons.

"It's just amazing seeing the different levels of how they've all come along and evolved creatively," said Frank Galtieri, show coordinator and Fabricland store manager. "You're watching them all grow up."

"They're creating something basically out of nothing," agreed Jeffrey Shaw, father of Amanda Shaw, 12, of Highland Park. "And they're developing skills and confidence as they create these dresses."

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