

neighbortoneighbor

By Maureen Stiles

A Labor of Love Lakelands Stay-At-Home Mom Debuts Blossom Bug

Many stay-at-home moms dream of starting a home-business. Envisioning their talent, and passion, turning to profit while children play happily at their feet. For some, this is the stuff of pure fantasy, but Main Street resident Heidi Kessler is making it a reality.

A former in-store set designer for Crate and Barrel's furniture division, Heidi has always felt a creative pull. After taking a year off after the birth of her first son, Davis (now two and a half) she decided to put her creative energies into staying home with him. Yet, she and husband Ian

Heidi Kessler spends a little time in the Blossom Bug home studio making a hand-sewn diaper bag.



Photos Courtesy: Maureen Stiles



Ian and Heidi Kessler, shown here with their sons Davis and Quinn, are enjoying life in their Main Street home.

were always searching for a way to start a business. "We've gone through a lot of ideas for a business. Ice cream shop, donut shop, consignment store," says Kessler, "but nothing ever felt right."

Little did she know that the

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City of Gaithersburg To Debut Art Trains

Public Art Project To Dawn Streets Throughout the City

By Gina Dropik

The City of Gaithersburg announced the debut of All Aboard the Art Train, a public art project similar to those held in several cities throughout the country. Residents may remember the decorated pandas that adorned the streets of

Washington, D.C. during the summer of 2004. Pandas are special to Washingtonians because of the live pandas at the National Zoo. Likewise trains are considered an important part of Gaithersburg's past, present and future.

The Art Train program has been designed to bring the arts into the streets of Gaithersburg. It will showcase local talent, increase the profile of Gaithersburg's public arts program, emphasize the City's close strong ties to its railway history, and provide an opportunity to connect the business and cultural communities.

As many as twenty fiberglass locomotives and cabooses will grace Gaithersburg streets,

all custom decorated by professional artists. The trains will be placed in front of private businesses and public facilities. According to Britta Monaco, City of Gaithersburg Public Information Director, the hope is the project will encourage residents to traverse the City in search of the unique displays.

Local artists are encouraged to submit creative designs for the train cars, which will be reviewed by a panel from the Arts in Public Places Committee. An artist's portfolio will be compiled featuring all accepted artists. Sponsors are currently being solicited for each of the train cars. Businesses, organizations, churches, or individuals can sponsor a train car. They will then choose an artist from the portfolio to decorate their train car. Denise Keyser, Cultural Arts Director, who is coordinating the project, said that sponsors may have some input on the design as well as the location of the finished train car.

The City is planning a community-wide debut of completed trains at the City's Annual 4th of July Celebration. The train cars will then be dispersed for viewing throughout the summer and fall. The locomotives will be nine feet long and six feet tall, and the cabooses will be six feet long and four feet tall.

The Art Train project is sponsored by the City of Gaithersburg and supported by the Gaithersburg Arts and Monuments Funding Corporation (GAMFC). GAMFC's mission is to heighten the awareness of revitalization and arts initiatives within the City of Gaithersburg, and to raise and allocate funds to support programs and initiatives. The project is also supported by the Gaithersburg-Germantown Chamber of Commerce.

Interested artists or those interested in sponsoring a train car are asked to call the Arts Barn at 301-258-6394 for more information. **L**

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childhood sewing lessons received from her grandmother would spark the idea that would stick. "I went to the Tot Swap last fall looking for used children items. As I walked through the room of new things, I thought 'I can do this.'" In a matter of days the concept of Blossom Bug took hold.

Blossom Bug is Kessler's line of home-made baby accessories. Having two small children, she was keenly aware that there was a need for unique baby gifts and accoutrements. Thus, she developed a line of 100% cotton, washable necessities that any mother would treasure.

The name was the result of an extended brainstorming session. "We spent three or four days with the dictionary looking for names. We started with 'B' for baby and wanted it to flow from there," said Heidi. Ian adds, "of course, the domain name also had to be available."

The Kesslers received assistance from an organization called Work At Home Mothers or WAHM. This network offers a web-based shopping portal featuring the merchandise of moms just like Heidi. "WAHM was a really big help. They have bulletin boards and forums for small businesses and newbie questions," explains Ian. "Their affiliated designers worked on our website and logo. We gave them our ideas and they created the framework for our website."

The website may still be under construction, but Heidi's home office is in full swing. An upstairs bedroom does double duty as playspace for Davis and Quinn, seven months, and workshop. Finding quiet moments to sew between naps, preschool and evenings has been a challenge but clearly a labor of love.

A tour of the space is a true visual feast. Diaper bags, quilts, burp cloths, bibs and changing pads in whimsical patterns nearly leap off the shelves. Just when you pick a favorite, Kessler pulls out another spectacular contender.

Heidi favors products grouped in collections with mixing and matching vibrant patterns. Obtaining most of her fabrics through the Internet, she buys unisex patterns and only what she can use. "I use the Internet because if I see a pattern I like, I can view the whole collection. I order a couple of patterns in the collection and make a sample for inventory. Then, I can customize the pattern with other parts of the collection to make a piece more masculine or feminine. For instance, if a customer sees a pink paisley pattern but wants something for a boy, I can order the fabric in blue or green."

Custom orders are encouraged as it gives Heidi a way to gauge trends and consumer needs. Heidi explains, "I would like to have nine to twelve collections available. As trends develop, I'll phase out older patterns and introduce more popular ones."

Thus far, Blossom Bug has relied on word of mouth from friends, family and moms from Davis' preschool for its business. The Kesslers are ready to take the business to the next level saying, "We are gearing up to formally launch the website with a mailing and ads. We are doing the Tot Swap at the Fairgrounds at the end of March and are considering other events like the Kentlands Oktoberfest. For now, we want to keep it local."

That's not to say the idea of growth is out of the picture. "I would definitely like to go to some local stores and see if they are interested in carrying the line, explains Heidi. "I really am used to working alone but I know eventually, I'll probably have to hire someone to help with the sewing."

Until then, Blossom Bug remains a family affair. The collaborative effort of Ian and Heidi allows them to handle the intricacies of this new venture on a day to day basis. And the two little ones playing at Heidi's feet are sure to provide inspiration for years to come.

Visit www.blossombug.com for product and ordering information. **L**



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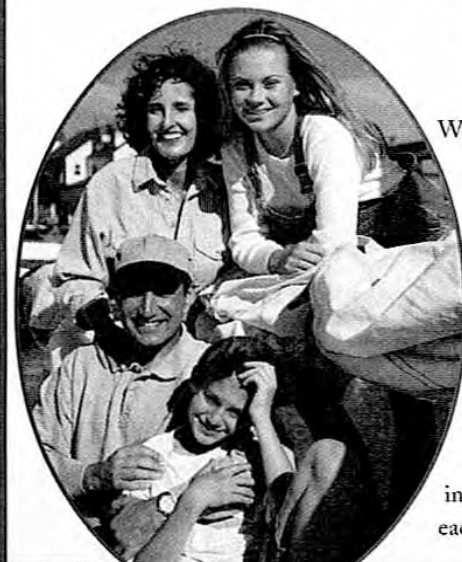
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