

Suburban Life

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Monaco

The standard leotard moves into the fashion world

By Lorraine McClish
staff writer

A Farmington Hills woman who sewed a few leotards for her daughter because she couldn't find any to buy she liked is now designing dancewear for 40 stores here and in California.

"The biggest sales are always from August through Christmas so this summer is when we learned what whole-sale manufacturing is all about," said Chris Lopez, who has turned out about 2,000 pieces with the label "Monaco."

"There wasn't much planning to this," said her husband Randy, who is now doing some pattern cutting and is keeper of the books. "The thing snowballed so fast, everything fell into place so well, it was almost as though it was meant to be."

The snowball he speaks of began with six pieces his wife offered to Gabe Shoes and Dancewear in Farmington Hills 18 months ago.

Monaco never advertised, not even for the independent contractors who approached the designer offering to do the piece work or assembling and, for a while, were turning out 50 pieces a week.

The snowballing continues with a new contract for Christmas sales with Ballerina Inc., a chain in southern California.

"It's the bright colors," Lopez said. "The ruffles, the puffed sleeves, just the fun of the fashion for little girls."

SEVEN-YEAR-old Renee Lopez, whose mother says she owns more leotards than anyone in the metropolitan

area, wears her Monaco-labeled dancewear to dance classes in Virginia Dickerman Studio and to gymnastics classes in Farmington Gymnastic Center.

The name Monaco is a take-off on the name Monte Carlo, which is "the most glamorous, fashionable place we've ever been and seemed to suit best what we wanted to say about the dancewear," the designer said.

Lopez has sewn clothing for her own use for about 10 years, but never took a sewing lesson.

She studied art under Sister Mary Ignatius in Mercy Center, but never designing.

Her parents were retailers and that never appealed to her.

Her husband thought it would be nice to one day go into business for himself, but "never suspected he would be

spending his off hours (as a pilot) learning how to cut patterns in the basement," Lopez said.

He also learned this on his own, when orders coming in at one point seemed to be getting out of hand.

The first leotard Lopez made for Renee was taken from a basic leotard pattern in swimwear, the material she still uses for all her designs, then "dressed up," she said.

"With an art background I knew something about putting colors together, but my big forte is that I'm an organizer," she said. "But with all of this falling in my lap so fast I haven't had the time to put style numbers on the pieces. We have names for the designs, but our clients are asking for numbers, easier for the bookkeeping. That's one more thing to learn in our learn-by-doing business."



Designer Chris Lopez is flanked by her daughter, Renee (on her left), and Erin Matulewicz, who wear Monaco dancewear. Renee's two-piece polka dot leotards are made with stirrup legs. Erin's turquoise-and-orchid-striped number comes with detachable skirt.



Renee Lopez (left) wears her mother's multi-colored design, "Paint Brush," fashioned with elbow-length puffed sleeves. Erin Matulewicz (right) models a mix of solid and print made in a wet-look fabric and fashioned with a double ruffle on the shoulders. Erin is a student at Wooddale Elementary School and wears her Monaco leotards to ballet classes with Evelyn Krasson and to tap dancing classes with Virginia Dickerman.



Staff photos by Randy Borst



JERRY ZOLYNSKY/staff photographer

It's U.S. Constitution Week

Sondra Love (at left) a member of Quakertown Chapter, Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) and Clara Bohrer, head of Farmington Hills Branch Library, prepare the library display announcing U.S. Constitution Week. Included in the display is "The Arts of Independence:

The DAR Museum Collection" by Elizabeth Donaghy Garret. The book is a gift to the library from Quakertown members commemorating the weeklong observance that continues through Sept. 23.

Center's registration opens

Farmington Community Center's fall term offers more than 60 classes and 70 workshops that will begin the week of Sept. 16.

The fall lineup offers classes in art, basketry, cooking, needlework, self-improvement, photography, plus the opportunity to attend workshops as varied as chocolate molding and money management. Available again this term is "A-Cali," the

ancient Chinese art of relaxation through graceful, slow movements.

There are classes for all ages from pre-school to seniors and a large variety from which to choose. Some new instructors have been added to also enhance this year's program. Registration for classes is 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. weekdays in the center, 24705 Farmington Road.

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