

Malls & Mainstreets

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Ahh: Relax the Back in Birmingham sells chairs that offer all the support you need to get the job done. This Therapod Basic is \$450-\$575.

Back relief is all in the chair

Eight out of 10 adults will develop a lower back problem at some point in their life. Sitting with poor posture, or for long periods of time, is often the contributing factor, according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Service's Agency for Health Care Policy and Research.

"A lot of people tend to slouch when they're sitting, because it feels comfortable. But it also leads to back pain, so in the long run, it's really more comfortable to have good posture," said Laurie Freeman, manager of Relax the Back, Birmingham.

The store, part of a retail chain, sells office chairs, recliners, beds and other products that are designed to prevent and relieve back pain. The folks at Relax the Back teach their clients how to sit properly: feet firmly on the floor, back straight.

But to sit comfortably and correctly for any length of time — especially at work — you need the right kind of chair.

"We ask our customers a lot of questions, to help them find the chair that's right for them," Freeman said. "We ask them what kind of work they do and what sort of repetitive motions they make when doing their job."

People who do a lot of phone work, for example, should have a seat that will rock back and forth with them as they stretch to pick up the receiver and dial, she said. Individuals who do a lot of desk or computer work should have a chair back that leans forward when they do, to give them good lumbar support, she said.

Remember the "kneeling" backless office chairs that were supposed to be ergonomically great for the spine? Instead of sitting, you kneeled into them? Freeman said they came out in the 1970s, and they're still around.

"But what we've found," she said, "is that you really do need a back and arms on a chair, if you're going to be sitting for long periods of time. You need total support, from your legs to your neck."

The most important features to have in an office chair, are seat height, an adjustable chair back that tilts forward when you do, and height-adjustable arm rests. Other good features include a seat bottom that can tilt forward with you, arm rests that can be swung outward to give you more room to reach for things, and arm rests that can be extended to support your forearm when you're using a computer mouse.

Seat depth is also important. The front edge of the seat should come close to your knees, to properly support your legs and thighs. Finding such a chair can sometimes be a problem for people with long legs, but not at Relax the Back, which carries a wide assortment of office chair sizes and styles.

"Many of the chairs we sell are custom-made for the client," Freeman said. Office chairs go for \$299 to \$2,600, but it's possible for some custom-made chairs to cost even more. The store also sells "Zero Gravity" recliners, which put a person in a position where his legs are at a 90 degree angle to his torso and above the heart.

If you're looking for portable lumbar support cushions, neck rolls and other things to make your chairs more ergonomically correct, then you might want to check out MedMax, which has stores in Westland, Farmington Hills, Rochester and Troy. It has those items and more in its Healthy Back Department.

For fun, or if you're in the market for a luxury chair, visit The Shopper Image at Brookstone in the Somerset Collection South, Troy, and try out their high-tech massage chairs, which cost about \$2,000 to \$3,000. You won't want to leave.



PHOTOS BY JERRY ZOLYNSKY.

Birmingham style shines at fall benefit



At its annual Fall Spectacular Wednesday night, Birmingham proved that it's still the place to go for food, fashion and services that are a cut above, and way out in front, of what mainstream shops and salons have to offer.

BY SUSAN DEMAGGIO

Look sharp! Feel good! From the CEO suits that opened the show to the racy lingerie at the finale, Birmingham's 30-some fashion retailers presented their finest merchandise at the 8th annual Fall Spectacular Wednesday night.

The clothes were hip, sophisticated and fun, prompting one show-goer to comment, "This town is the closest thing to New York in the Midwest."

Running well past an hour, the fashion show's exuberant tone and luxurious clothing, furs and hairstyles, was a manifesto to anyone who doubted the town's independent merchants could survive the opening of the swanky Somerset Collection North mall, just three miles away.

"Birmingham is choices," said Jayme Leib, owner of Imeldin's Closet, a shoe and accessories shop in town. "Our products are fresh and new."

The evening, which included a taste of the town, live and silent auction of unique merchandise/service packages,

plus a galleries exhibit, raised more than \$200,000 for The Pediatric Cancer Survivors Scholarship Fund of William Beaumont Hospital.

This year, 22 area teens who beat childhood cancers will receive four-year college scholarships of \$1,000 each year, due to the efforts of Birmingham merchants spearheaded by the hero and chief of Beaumont's Pediatric Hematology/Oncology, Dr. Charles

Main.

A couple serving as ushers at the Fall Spectacular praised the event, blinking back tears as they described their young daughter's five-year battle with cancer, and her present good fortune to be a scholarship recipient in her second year of pre-med at U of M.

Master of Ceremonies Jim Harper of WNIC radio, shared the stage with fashion show coordinator Dayna Pink, WXYZ Health Reporter Denise Dador, Senator and Mrs. Michael Bouchard, Dr. and Mrs. Charles Main, auctioneer Larry DuMouchelle, and one of the event's key organizer's jeweler Richard Astrean.

One of the many highlights of the

runway show was the Kiddlywinks segment which proved that little ones love to dress up like grown-ups in fashions and hair-dos that make you smile.

The show opened and closed with the pulsating rhythms of the Twisting Tarantules. The model's fanciful hairstyles and makeup played off the attitude of the hip fashions and no doubt were a lot of fun for the crews at Antonia's, Beaton Colors, Ninetish Floor, Salon Kenzie Bashin, Salon Sydney and Todd's Room.

In between segments, the crowd watched video shot in Beaumont's Pediatric Oncology Department and around town in Birmingham, which linked each entity's struggle for success and sense of a higher purpose.

Friends Meg Harrison of Franklin, and Marlene Ziral of Bloomfield Hills, said they came to the event "because it's fun and for a good cause."

Said Harrison after the show, "The fashions were beautiful and I was glad to see so many more brows and color instead of black! Look around! Most everyone here is wearing black!"

David Banda, a Troy dentist, said he really enjoyed the fashion show, especially the men's laid-back looks from The Claymore Shop and Article II. "But, many of the fashions were so on edge, I don't know if they'll be wearing them on the street."

Show stopping stars:

- Oakland Athletic Club workout wear
- Short hair bangs, hair infused with color
- Harry's Lingerie shapewear with garter straps
- Funky, hand-knit sweaters from Basic Goods, It's The Ritz, Lisa Parks
- Jacobson's and Tender's body-hugging jewel-toned cut-out velvet gowns
- Swing coats with long chenille scarves, bowties
- Shades' eyeglasses with either minimal frames, or heavy plastic frames
- Polar fleece vests and jackets, sheepskin collars
- Cargo pants with pockets on the thighs and legs
- Maxwell, Claymore Shop three-button suits, rich-hued dress shirts
- Thom Loffler's jeans and crewneck sweaters
- Timbuktu's casual, unstructured jackets
- Edward Dorian, Redwood & Ross tailored, very-structured suits

News of special events for shoppers is included in this calendar. Send information to: Malls & Mainstreets, c/o The Observer & Eccentric 805 East Maple, 48009; or fax (248) 644-1314. Deadline: Wednesday 5 p.m. for publication on Sunday.

SUNDAY, SEPT. 28

Remodeling Show
The 5th Annual Fall Remodeling Expo presented by the Building Industry of Southeastern Michigan from 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. Admission \$8 adults, \$4 senior citizens. More than 200 exhibitors will show off the latest merchandise and services for the home and garden.
Novi Expo Center 1-96/Novi.
(248) 737-4478.

MONDAY, SEPT. 29

Monday Night Football
Lions tight end Pete Metzelaers will sign autographs from 5-8 p.m. in the H.Court area of the mall. Event tickets are \$4 and available at Pitch, Hit and Run Next week, place kicker Jason Hanson will be available to fans.

ADDED ATTRACTIONS

Livonia Mall, Seven Mile/Middlebelt.
(248) 474-4266.

THURSDAY, OCT. 2

Lombardo orchestra visits
Guy Lombardo's Royal Canadians with Al Piscierno performs live at the mall for two concerts 6 and 8 p.m. on stage near Crowley's. Come early for the best seats. Bring a camera.
Livonia Mall, Seven Mile/Middlebelt.
(248) 476-1160.

Fragrance seminar
Learn to create your own aroma from author Colleen Dolt, 7-9 p.m. at Naturally. The author of *The Essential Oils Book* will answer questions and demonstrate her art. Prepare a potion to take home and have fun experimenting with rare oils.
550 Forest, Plymouth.
(313) 463-9491.

Craft fair

Arts and crafts made in America for show and sale throughout the mall through Oct. 5 during regular business hours. Look for paintings, pottery, stained glass, wood crafts, jewelry and more. A Raab Enterprises Production.
Westland Center Wayne/Warren.
(313) 425-6001.

SATURDAY, OCT. 4

Farmer's Market last week
Both downtown Plymouth and Farmington offer fresh produce, bakery goods, flowers and herbs, plus much more through Oct. 25. Hot coffee and cold lemonade in Plymouth's gathering across from Kellogg Park. Ann Arbor Trail/Main. (313) 463-1640.
Farmington. Grand River/East of Farmington.
Oktoberfest
Olde World Canterbury Village hosts bands and authentic foods through Oct. 5. Always Christmas Stars has many collectibles, themed ornaments.
C/O 1-75, Exit #83 North. Lake Orion.
(248) 391-5700.