

What to wear

Bridal salons may suit you

Anyone who's ever scrambled to find the right dress for a special occasion can identify with Harriet Spurlin of Livonia.

When she received an invitation to a bar mitzvah at the Tam O'Shanter Country Club in West Bloomfield, she visited one department store after another, searching for the perfect dress, to no avail. Then she thought, why not try a bridal shop?

She found what she was looking for at Bonnie's Bridal in Livonia.

"I found a beautiful velvet gown there, but it was too tight due to middle-age spread. They let it out for me. I felt beautiful," she said. "I just wanted to tell your readers about this store so it could be a source for others shopping for special occasion dresses. Plus, the alterations helped do wonders. The staff was so nice," she said.

Here's more information about Bonnie's and other stores you might want to try if you're searching for a special dress, too.

About one-third of the dresses at Bonnie's Bridal shop are wedding gowns. The rest are social occasion, bridesmaid and prom dresses.

Customers can buy dresses off the rack (generally in sizes 6 to 30), order them from the manufacturer (available sizes are usually 2 to 42), or have the seamstresses custom make a dress, said Karen McDermott, who co-owns the store with Bonnie Bentley.

Some of the names the store carries include: Bill Levkoff, Jordan, Caterina, Sylvia Anne and Nadine. Manufacturer orders generally take eight to 12 weeks to come in and it takes about 12 weeks to custom make a dress.

Social occasion dresses generally run from \$125 to \$350. The store has been at its current location, 19183 Merriman at Seven Mile Road, for the past five years. Call (248) 471-7394.

If you're looking for the kind of dress a movie star would wear, try Exclusives for the Bride at 1815 N. Old Woodward in Birmingham. The shop carries formal and bridal gowns by Vera Wang, Badgley Miskha and other designers.

Women see their favorite actresses wearing Vera Wang or Badgley Miskha in magazines and then come to us because they know we carry them," said the manager, Jacqui Furumo.

It usually takes 12 to 16 weeks for an ordered dress to come in. Most people don't have that long from the time they receive an invitation until the event itself. For that reason, "A lot of women will order a dress, just to have it on hand," Furumo said.

Customers also can buy sample dresses off the rack, but the sizes are limited (usually 8 to 12). Regular-priced bridesmaid and social occasion dresses start at about \$225. Bridal gowns can run from \$1,200 to \$7,000.

Alterations are extra and dresses also can be custom made. For more information, call (248) 647-4999.

Shapes Design Studio, 208 Eleven Mile Road at Main Street in Royal Oak, carries a wide variety of contemporary women's clothing, from "fun separates to extraordinary evening dresses and bridal gowns," said its owner, Treas Charow.

The store carries dress sizes 4 to 12, and clothing also can be custom made. Evening gowns start at about \$200. Prom dresses run from \$80 (for short ones) to \$250 (for full-length ones). Alterations available for a small cost.

Popular this spring, Charow said, are looks that combine layers of sheer fabric with layers of lace in bright, fresh colors.

Black is always popular, she said, especially in slip dresses that are strappy and shapely. For more information about Shapes, call (248) 647-4990.

Betsy's Bridal, at 6335 Orchard Lake Road in West Bloomfield's Orchard Mall, has a wide selection of formal gowns, with more than 600 to choose from, according to owner, Betsy Nasour.

"I only carry full-length gowns. I don't carry short dresses," she said. Formal start at about \$300 and prom dresses run between \$150 and \$400. Popular looks for prom this year include sheath and trumpet-style silhouettes, sheer fabric around the midriff, halter-style necklines, and exotic colors, such as neon green, lavender and light ice blue, she said. For more information (248) 855-3770.

SHOPPING CENTERED



DONNA MULCAHY



PHOTO BY SHARON LEMIEUX

Green retailers: Minding the Tree House store in Farmington are: (left) Simone McReynolds, massage therapist, and Herman, Christine and Cloriece Meinke.

Organic specialists open a shop for nature lovers

BY AMY MESSANO SPECIAL WRITER

This tree house does not come equipped with a blue sky, chirping birds and lush plants stretching for the sun, but you don't have to climb a ladder or be a member of a secret club to get in. The Tree House for Earth's Children in Farmington is an organic connection for many environmentally conscious shoppers.

"We don't want to just utilize nature, we want to be a part of it," said certified myomassologist and store owner, Christine Meinke, about the philosophical root of this family-run business. And that's a message that is abundantly clear as you stroll down the aisles of organically grown vegetables, vitamin supplements and herbs.

There is even an organic raw food deli that serves up good-for-you snacks and favorites like a calcium-rich sesame drink made with horsetail (shavegrass), red clover and prickly ash.

"My favorite is the strawberry shake made also with bananas, honey and maple syrup," said eight-year-old Cloriece Meinke, Christine's daughter, as she gives a spur-of-the-moment, oiled foot massage to a regular customer, Gary Wickersham of Farmington.

"They are not just trying to sell products, but provide information so people can make up their own decisions," said

'We're laying the groundwork for future generations. If a child leaves here and only remembers a turtle or a plant they touched, but one day decides to plant his own garden, then it's all worth it.'

- Susan Meinke

a horizontal Wickersham. Besides giving him a place to hang out and drink carrot juice, the wide variety of products and the availability of alternative information are some of the reasons that keep Wickersham coming back.

Tree House for Earth's Children also carries organic, 100-percent cotton and hemp clothing for all sizes, personal hygiene products that involved no animal testing and literature that shares the store's holistic approach to life.

Kirk Meinke, who makes jewelry sold at the store and Christine's brother, said the store is "all about showing people another direction in which to live." For that reason the store offers classes in Tai-Chi, alchemy, biodynamic gardening and preparing organic raw food.

If it's a visit to a holistic doctor, an oxygen bath or a massage that you desire, they've got those too.

All of the Meinkes are knowledgeable about the products they sell and the beliefs they stand firmly behind. Herman, Kirk and Christine's father is a research scientist and alchemist who helps to run the store.

Herman Meinke is passionate about biodynamic gardening with what he calls "living water" that he credits for growing a 22-foot-tall corn stalk that produced a 28-inch cornucob in 1982. According to Christine, people come from as far as northern Michigan, Ohio and Indiana to learn about her father's gardening techniques.

Herman's wife Susan, is a registered nurse at Botsford Hospital, an alchemist, certified myomassologist, mother, grandmother and manager of the store. On top of all that, in a pinch, Susan delivered Christine's youngest daughter three months ago.

Susan Meinke believes Tree House for Earth's Children is exactly what the name "tree house" connotes, "a sanctuary half way between heaven and earth." To her, as to the rest of the Meinke family, the store's organic integrity is for the children.

"We're laying the ground work for future generations," Susan said. "If a child leaves here and only remembers a turtle or a plant they touched, but one day decides to plant his own garden, then it's all worth it."

Rabbits hop out at malls

Whether you call him Peter Rabbit, Peter Cottontail, or just The Easter Bunny, this March Hare is the star at area malls this week through April 11.

BY SUSAN DEMAGGIO EDITOR

The malls are getting ready to welcome some very famous rabbits this weekend, preparing garden settings and hosting local performers appearing in spring programs for children.

At the Fairlane Center in Dearborn, each child who visits Peter Rabbit in his storybook garden beginning Saturday, March 28, will receive a water-coloring book while their parents purchase special photographs.

Fairlane is also hosting a drawing for a basket full of bunny buns, valued at \$400, which includes 40 plush pets from various mall retailers including The Disney Store, Natural Wonders and Warner Bros.

Not to be outdone, Lakeside Center in Sterling Heights, welcomes Peter Rabbit with a free, 40-minute puppet performance of *There's A Frog in the Woods* by Brad Lowe's Fantasy E-FEX at noon, also on Saturday, March 28.

For the first time, Lakeside visitors who want photos of their kids with the bunny can buy them on a floppy disk. Photographers will be using the digital imaging process which will allow parents the option of using home computers to send the photos to loved ones over the Internet.

At The Somerset Collection, Troy, the spring bunny takes on a new persona as Nestor Fairweather, "a Grassrabbit Gentleman." He resides in a village of small play cottages in the North End, designed and built by artist John Bellomo which will be auctioned off at the end of the season to benefit The Lovelight Foundation.

The mall is also hosting a series of performances by the Children's Theatre of Michigan, *Beyond The Garden Wall*, with three alternating storylines. Dates and times are posted throughout the center and on brochures near the concierge desks.



ADDED ATTRACTIONS

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

SUNDAY, MARCH 22

Spring program for kids
"The World Beyond The Garden," a musical presentation by the Children's Theatre of Michigan, performed free on Grand Court stage, Sundays at 1 and 3 p.m. and throughout the week. Stories differ each day. Visits with the spring bunny, Nestor Fairweather, begin March 28 through April 11. Polaroid courtesy of the mall for \$10. Somerset Collection North. Big Beaver/Coolidge, Troy. (248) 916-6484.

Puppet Show
Enter the Mank Puppet Theatre's magic world where sunflowers sing to vegetarian monsters. 2 p.m. Free show. Borders Books, 30995 Orchard Lake. Farmington Hills. (248) 737-0110.

Book signing
Meet Stephanie Mellen from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Waldenbooks, 30200 Plymouth. Livonia. (734) 261-7811.

Easter Bunny photos
The "Eggs-tra" special garden at Center Court will be home to photo visits with the Easter Bunny through April 11, during mall hours. Each child who visits will receive a Easter Egg stuffed with surprise. Digital photos available from \$9.99 to \$39.50. Northland Center Nine Mile/Greenfield. Southfield. (248) 569-6272.

Easter Bunny photos
Photos and bunny visits through April 11. Free. Westland Center Wayne/Warren. (313) 425-6007.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 25

Liz petites seminar

Hudson's hosts a workshop commented by Liz Claiborne specialist Karla Gaudar 12:30 p.m. Level Two featuring the newest looks for spring. Repeated on March 26 at 12:30 p.m. at the Twelve Oaks, Novi, store. Free. Public is invited.

Somerset Collection North. Big Beaver/Coolidge, Troy.

THURSDAY, MARCH 26

Personal lingiro fittings
Hudson's hosts Wacoal fittings with a computer imaging analyzer in private fitting rooms. 2-7 p.m. Repeated March 27 from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Free. Reservations not required.

Somerset Collection North. Big Beaver/Coolidge, Troy. (248) 443-4774.

FRIDAY, MARCH 27

Easter Bunny arrival
Jolly Bean Park Easter Bunny Show begins with kids picking up neon sunglasses at 6:30 p.m. for a magic show that starts at 7 p.m. and ends with the surprise arrival of you-know-who. Photos through April 11. Visit the Customer Service Booth for a coloring sheet featuring a wild and wacky Easter Rabbit. Kids of all ages are invited to color the rabbit for a chance to win a \$50 mall gift certificate. Names randomly drawn on April 13. Winner notified by phone or mail.

Universal Mall, 12 Mile/Dequindre Warren. (313) 761-5161.

Easter Bunny arrival
Now through April 11 photos in JC Penney wing. On March 29 the Clawson High school Band performs from 3-6 p.m. Oakland Mall, 14 Mile/John R. Troy. (248) 585-6000.

SATURDAY, MARCH 28

Holiday kids program
Peter Rabbit & Friends, performed by Theatre Arts Productions, 1 p.m. Center Court. Free. Bunny arrives at the end of the show for photo opportunities through April 11. Free gifts for kids who visit. Decorated Easter Egg trees on display.

Tel/Twelve Mall, 12 Mile/Telegraph. Southfield. (248) 353-4111.

Easter kids show
The Easter Bunny arrives at 11 a.m. for instant photos \$6.95. Gardens bloom with live spring flowers, gifts for kids who visit the bunny. Wings & Wheels aircraft and motorcycle club presents displays and exhibits through March 29.

Livonia Mall, Seven Mile/Middlebelt. (248) 476-1160.

DKNY show
Neiman Marcus hosts a DKNY spring fashion presentation at 1 p.m. Leisure sportswear on Level 2. Reservations required for the free show.

Somerset Collection South. Big Beaver/Coolidge, Troy. (248) 643-3300, ext. 2511.

SUNDAY, MARCH 29

Barbie Doll collectors show
8th annual show with many dealers and collectors from the Great Lakes Barbie Doll Collectors Club. Fun for all ages with special guest designer Carol Spencer from Mattel. \$4 admission benefits local kids charities. 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Bring old dolls and accessories for appraisals.

Livonia Marriott, Six Mile/Newburg. (313) 432-6146.

Peter Rabbit visits
Coloring, storytelling, photo opportunities and an egg hunt when Peter Rabbit visits Hudson's Kids Department 1-3 p.m. Free.

Summit Place, Elizabeth Lake/Telegraph. Waterford. (248) 683-6400.