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## Students Partner with Bridal Shop to Rework Outdated Wedding Gowns

Feb-06-2006

Four outdated, unwanted wedding gowns have been given a chance at a glamorous new life, thanks to an extreme makeover by some Eastern Illinois University students.

The gowns were rescued from the past-sale rack at Ducky's Bridal and Formal Wear in Champaign, where the redesigned, one-of-a-kind dresses will now head back to the selling floor.

"The dresses were quite out of date, fashion-wise, but the fabric and lace were still good," said Mary Gray, the shop owner who offered to let the EIU patterning design students have a shot at making the gowns relevant to today's look.

The eight-member class paired off and got to work, lopping off long sleeves, snipping excessive beads and sequins, trimming trains and adding other special touches.

The teams were allowed to rework the gowns any way they chose.

"We made sure we didn't do anything drastic, because it is for a business," said Katherine Niebrugge, a junior from Effingham.

The gowns were unveiled, so to speak, in the Textile Design Lab in Klehm Hall last week. Ducky's wanted to gather opinions on the dresses' marketability, so people who wandered in to check out the dresses were asked to fill out a survey. Those surveyed were asked to choose appropriate prices for each dress, ranging from \$400 to \$1,100.

"Before" pictures were provided so people could see the changes, which were major.

The most dramatic change came with the gown reworked by Niebrugge and Jennifer Johnson of Glen Ellyn. The women removed the beaded outer layers of their ivory dress to reveal vanilla-colored silk shantung. They then added a bronze sash around the waistline and turned the once long-sleeved dress into a simple, elegant strapless gown.

All of the dresses' changes were painstakingly carried out in a relatively short time period.

"We've just been in school four weeks, and they have finished this huge project," said Professor Jean Dilworth, estimating that each student worked about 20 hours.

The students, who said they appreciated the hands-on experience, said they didn't expect the work to be so grueling.

"I'll appreciate every dollar I spend on my dress," Niebrugge said.

This was Dilworth's first such partnership with a bridal shop, and she hopes to repeat it with future classes. The patterning design course is offered in the spring semester as part of the merchandising concentration in EIU's School of Family and Consumer Sciences.

"It's a great concept," Dilworth said.

Ducky's plans to put the garments on the selling floor immediately after they are returned this week, and the shop owner will share a portion of the selling price of the first gown when it is sold.

The department will use the funds to offset the cost of materials and supplies for two other classes: clothing and soft goods construction, and apparel and textile design.

"In the 'real world,' if the gowns do not sell, there is no income; it's the same for us," Dilworth said.

Even if that's the case, she said, the project won't be counted as a loss. "The experience for the students is a profit of experience and knowledge," she said.

Other students in the class are Lacy Sallee, a graduate student from Charleston; Katie Shaw, also an EIU faculty member, who lives in Charleston; Heather Posch of Midlothian; Megan Bergschneider of Jacksonville; Kristin Sullivan of Palos Heights; and Tina Sabo of Orland Park.



*EIU students Kristin Sullivan of Palos Heights (left) and Tina Sabo of Orland Park (center) explain to a visitor how they redesigned a wedding dress as part of a class project.*