



Lexi Orlando of Gloucester models "A Summer at Lighthouse Beach," created by Daphne Papp for her daughter, Charlotte's, Miss Massachusetts pageant. The dress is crafted from can tabs and was assembled on Lighthouse Beach with Daphne and friends.



WEAR THE ART IS

seARTS brings a wide array of artists together in an effort to grow Cape Ann's creative economy beyond the bounds of imagination

On a Sunday afternoon in autumn, Gloucester's customarily genteel Bass Rocks Golf Club was invaded by a creative force so strong as to stretch the bounds of the imagination of even the most imaginative.

Models strutted the runway in attire ranging from a fine silk pant suit, to an outfit crafted of wheels, and a cocktail dress fashioned from Smartie candy wrappers. The occasion was at Celebrate Wearable Art!, featuring clothing and accessories ranging from elegant to avant-garde and even downright odd.

All the works were handmade by artists from New England, New York and as far away as Barcelona and chosen for inclusion in this benefit organized by the Society for the Encouragement of the Arts (seARTS). A 12-year-old consortium of arts and cultural entities, seARTS is invested in promoting the creative economy by nurturing and growing artistic enterprise and industry on Cape Ann.

"SeARTS has been an incubator organization for many ideas. Some have worked and some have not," said Jacqueline Ganim-

DeFalco, board chair. "Our goal is that the good ones become part of the mainstream. You learn along the way."

Much of the organization's work involves discussions on concepts and building relationships. Artists working in like mediums break into subgroups, such as the Wearable Art one – the force behind the event at the golf club.

All of the group's efforts carry the intent to produce tangible results, like bringing visitors and customers to the area to build interest in the work being done by so many artists here.

In recent years, seARTS has raised its visibility through programs and events like Celebrate Wearable Art!, but that is not central to its work. For instance, the group recently finished a three-year process of collecting data about the local creative economy to be used to inform several initiatives to measure the impact of the arts here.

"Gloucester has a deep, strong cultural history," said James Caviston, president of the board. "So many industries have come and gone over the past 200 years, but art has remained." ➤

By GAIL MCCARTHY • Photos by DAVID LE

The local creative economy already is widely recognized and its profile is on the rise. Earlier this year, Gloucester was named by American Style magazine as a “Top 25 Small City” on its list of key U.S. arts destinations. SeARTS board member-elect Kristine Fisher led the campaign to get Gloucester on the ballot and then to rally the community and American Style readers to vote.

Gloucester came in at No. 3, just behind Asheville, N.C. and Santa Fe, N.M. It was called an “up-and-comer” and references were made to Rocky Neck, the Nights on the Neck, the new “Annie” theater, the Cape Ann Artisans tour and the Waterfront Festival.

The Celebrate Wearable Art! event marked the fifth anniversary of the Wearable Arts sub-group of seARTS.

“When you get to five years, it’s significant. And when you have a milestone, if you don’t make it special, it will pass you by,” said Ganim-DeFalco, a sea-glass designer. “We wanted to celebrate and raise the bar yet again.”

She dreams of sowing the seeds for an event like the international wearable art show held annually in New Zealand, which attracts more than 35,000 people a day.

“We could do something like that on Cape Ann,” she said. “In order to have a vibrant arts town, a destination arts town, one of the components that is needed is a big festival or event that attracts a wide range of people and has your brand on it.”

Wearable art includes hand-made and one-of-a-kind jewelry, clothing and accessories created as fine or expressive art. Ganim-DeFalco believes Celebrate Wearable Art! has great potential in that literally any artist can turn their medium into wearable art, simply by getting a little bit outside of their comfort zone and pushing the limits of their medium.

She noted that in one hour, nearly \$10,000 worth of products were sold at the event.

“That’s a lot of transactions,” she said. “If we can continue to engage the community at large and in particular, the arts community, this type of event can become centrifugal to the art scene as we evolve our place in the region.”

The day-long celebration featured a jewelry and fiber art marketplace, lunch, cash bar, and runway-style live fashion segments. Among highlights were a preview of Boston-based Rising Design Group’s fashions that would be shown later that week as part of Boston Fashion Week.



Photo by CLARK LINEHAN

Local artist Nonie Brady models Kate Seidman’s “Amazon” design, which incorporates photos of Cape Ann quarries taken by Les Bartlett.

With her tin-can-tab dress, earrings and handbag, Daphne Papp of Annisquam showed how artists right here are creating incredible one-of-a-kind fashions.

And that’s just what the people at the Gloucester-based seARTS hoped to illustrate, to consumers, as well as to lawmakers committed to supporting the creative economy.

In July 2010, Massachusetts passed legislation to establish state-designated cultural districts in cities and towns

throughout the Commonwealth. Any city or town in Massachusetts is eligible to apply for a cultural district designation.

“Making sure the cultural districts happen is the ultimate in terms of what seARTS is about,” said Ganim-DeFalco. “It’s important because it is a place holder for the future, when there is eventually state funding and there are incentives available.”

Ganim-DeFalco said such a designation would help attract cultural tourists, ➤



June Monteiro of Washington, D.C., designed this "Smartie Dress" while she was an eighth-grade art teacher and fashion design student at MassArt. Her eighth-graders ate 1,100 Smartie candy packs to create this playful sweetheart dress.



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A snapshot of June Monteiro's Isabella Blow Homage Series. Monteiro is part of the Rising Design Group of Boston, invited by seARTS to showcase new designers.

which is the largest growth segment of the visitor-based economy on the North Shore.

In addition to Celebrate Wearable Art!, seARTS runs an annual Wearable Arts Holiday Show & Sale, which has become an integral part of Gloucester's Middle Street walk in December and features a raffle that benefits the library.

These events are examples of how change can start in baby steps.

"I've had two people come to my shop who had never been here, but stopped in because of the show and their enthusiasm for my work," said Beth Williams, a bead maker and jewelry designer who participated in Celebrate Wearable Art!. "I also had long-time regular customers from out of town come to the event. Both are examples of building the creative economy here."

Williams, who has been practicing her art for 20 years, has attended some of the meetings to create a cultural district. She also is part of the 28-year-old, twice-a-year Cape Ann Artisans Tour.

"We get new customers every time we have a tour," she said. "This group is part of the creative economy and I think it's coming to be recognized as such. We are a little engine in our own right."

Terry Weber, a writer, stepped up to help with seARTS because she views the organization's efforts as working to keep the magic of the arts alive on Cape Ann.

"As a writer, I consider myself to be a certain kind of artist. And I like to support the arts in general, whatever method of art that may be," she said. "I think it's essential to life that we have the arts. Some people consider it the icing on the cake, not the cake itself. I feel without art, life would be quite bland."

Andree Robert of Gloucester was among the nearly 170 people in the audience at Celebrate Wearable Art!

"The event was incredible and so much fun. I loved seeing all the clothes, even the experimental ones," she said. "I try to buy things locally. And I thought the work of the local artists totally stood up to the ones who came from around the country. That was great to see."

Peg Nolte of Gloucester, a teacher of art at O'Maley Middle School for 17 years, wanted to show her support for seARTS and local artists.

"I see how small towns have flourished in promoting their arts, like Newburyport and Rockport's Shalin Liu Performance Center," she said. "This event was fabulous, and having Rising Design and Mobius from Boston put a cutting edge twist on it."

Michele Harrison, an attorney, said she was struck by the diverse group of Cape Ann residents who turned out for the event.

"There were people who were artists and others who appreciate it," she said. "I liked the idea of seeing the wearable art put forward and stretching our viewpoint a little bit."

Katie Pray of New York wowed the crowd with her designs – a pant suit, wedding dress and cocktail dress – all made entirely of recycled zippers.

"Art needs to pique people's curiosity. Perhaps after the event, they'll go home and twist up some foil and create something," said Pray, a saxophone player and teacher who came to fashion design only after her sister bought her a sewing machine as a bridal gift.

This was her first visit to Gloucester. She was struck by the creative energy.

"The only thing that I knew about the area was from something I read about how this was one of the most painted oceanscapes," she said. "I was impressed with everyone's work. I saw enough that it made me want to come back and see some more." **CA**



Model Sara June, a member of the Mobius group, presents "RECORDS" created by Albert Negrado of Barcelona, Spain.

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