

Filling the FASHION VOID

With the Institute of Design and Technology, Anita Kealey brings students a chance to explore a career in fashion close to home

By Michelle Rydell

Photo by Hauschildt's Photography

It may be her Midwestern upbringing or just instinctive doggedness, but for whatever reason, when Anita Kealey wants something to happen, she makes it happen.

Kealey, a native South Dakotan who owns The Design Studio in downtown Sioux Falls, is launching several fashion design programs that she hopes gives

for South Dakota's first fashion design program, the Institute of Design and Technology of South Dakota. Kealey is also creating week-long "Project Design Boot Camps" that will start this summer and are aimed at eighth-grade to senior high school students.

"Instead of waiting for something to happen, I go and make it happen," she says. "When I was first starting in the business, I hit a glass ceiling. I was really an oddity, being very focused on a career. I bumped my head many times on that glass ceiling. But my attitude was, 'I'm going to create.' Whenever there is a need, I go and create something."

The nine-month design program will admit only 20 students and cost approximately \$12,500, Kealey says. The costs cover tuition, lab fees, a trip to the garment district in New York City, and materials. Classes will be held at historic 125 S. Main Street, near Kealey's own design loft.

According to Kealey, the Midwest lacks any sort of fashion design program that is competitive with schools on the coasts. She is confident her program has the potential to turn that stereotype around. As a designer known in the Miss American pageant circles for her leg-lengthening stilettos, Kealey says she's gotten

more national exposure because of her South Dakota roots.

"I really think I've gotten this response because it's not expected," she says. "I've been to a lot of design awards, and they always remember the designer from South Dakota. We have a huge advantage right here in our own backyard. Nationally, they take note of us because we're not what they expect."



Kealey (wearing a top from her Dakota by Design fashion line) seeks to create a competitive fashion design program in the Midwest - at a fraction of the price compared to the programs on the coasts.

South Dakota students a chance to explore fashion design as a career.

Starting in September, Kealey will be one of a handful of teachers who are signed on as instructors

In comparison to most four-year design schools on the coasts, Kealey thinks her program is “incredibly reasonable.

“Most four-year programs run about \$20-25,000 a year,” she says. “That’s a big investment. This will be a totally extensive study, and you’re going to learn as

portunity to build a portfolio. O’Connor attended a month-long summer program at the Fashion Institute of Technology in New York City in 2004 and said the experience, though worthwhile, was costly.

“Travelling that far made it really difficult for a student, especially high school students,” she says.

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much in that one year that normally in design school you wouldn’t get to do until your junior or senior year.”

Molly O’Connor, a senior at the University of South Dakota who is possibly interested in pursuing an education in fashion design, says she thinks it is important for South Dakota students to have an op-

portunity to build a portfolio. O’Connor attended a month-long summer program at the Fashion Institute of Technology in New York City in 2004 and said the experience, though worthwhile, was costly.

“It’s a drawback for students from South Dakota to have to go to New York City to take those kinds of classes. I’m guessing I was one of the few from the Midwest.”

The education that will be offered at the Institute of Design and Technology of South Dakota will range from classically-based illustration, such as drawing the human body, to learning the tricks of entrepreneurship. The students will develop a clothing collection, some of which will be sold as part of Kealey’s Dakota by Design line. Three of those pieces will also be modeled at a fashion show in May, Kealey says.

“They will get the whole design experience that I had to do in my four years (at Parsons School of Design in New York),” she says.

To celebrate its first year, the school will be offering a total of \$5,000 worth of scholarships, Kealey says. She hopes in 2010 the school will offer up to \$10,000. The scholarship application, which is essentially a design competition, is due May 29. Students can find out more about the scholarship at www.idtsd.org.

Kealey’s week-long Project Design Boot Camp is designed to give younger students a taste for design and a chance to build their portfolio. Classes will run from 9:30-4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday and cost \$695. The costs include meals and about \$250 of supplies that students will be able to keep, Kealey says. Discounts up to 40 percent are also available for students who register early and who take multiple classes.

It’s a great cost for the experience, she says, noting that comparable camps across the country can cost up to \$5,000. The camps will end with a gallery presentation for family and friends, where students will display their drawings, designs and clothing.

“It’s a lot like Project Runway,” Kealey says. “You have competition in your class, and you are only as good as the peers around you. It’s really cool how students feed off each other and improve. They are going to be the envy of their friends.”



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