

# Design institute provides affordable option

By Lisa Peterson

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At age 41, Steph Tamisiea was out of work and at a career crossroads. Downsized from her position with a pharmaceutical company, she stayed home with her two daughters for 18 months while contemplating her next move.

"At that point, I really did some soul-searching as far as what I wanted to do," said Tamisiea, who lives in Yankton. "I'd been considering taking a course on interior design for a very long time, but the courses I looked into were way above my budget, and my time was very limited."

Tamisiea found the Institute of Design & Technology of South Dakota through an online search. Founded in 2008 by Sioux Falls designer and entrepreneur Anita Kealey, IDTSD markets itself as an affordable and convenient option with hands-on training in the fields of fashion design and interior decor.

In five years, the institute has grown its reputation in the industry. It draws students from out of state and nationally recognized designers for special events.



Anita Kealey

The idea came to Kealey after years of talking at schools about careers in interior and fashion design. She began offering summer exploration programs to give students more hands-on experience.

"We wanted them to know there's more to it than the creative and artistic side, so they would really get an idea of how important their math or logical thinking was," said Kealey, director of interior and fashion design studies. "From there, I would have students come and say, 'I really want to go into this field, but I can't afford to go to school on the East or West Coast.' So the whole idea was right under our nose."

The institute operates from the same downtown building as Kealey's business, The Design Studio. Students complete nine-month certification programs and can test for a designation from Certified Interior Decorators International.

Working at their own pace, students learn one subject at a time. They receive one-on-one attention from a design professional and take field trips to see designers at work.

Kealey said she doesn't want more than six students in each program at once.

"It's all about quality of the students and the experience," she said. "We turn

down three-quarters of those who apply for our fashion program. We're all about the right mix of students, so we handpick those students very carefully."

Each May, IDTSD showcases its students' portfolios at the Form Plus Fashion Meets Function event. For multiple years, the event has included guest designers from the television show "Project Runway."

## Success stories

The institute was the right fit for Tamisiea.

"Anita's program was perfect for me in that I could do one day a week, and then I had outside work throughout the week to complete on my own," she said. "It was the perfect blend for someone like me who has a family and other responsibilities, and I needed something close to home. I looked at some online programs, but I really felt that in a creative field, I needed something hands-on."

Students have come from as far as Minneapolis, and many work one or two jobs while attending the institute.

According to Kealey, the tuition at most design institutes is between \$25,000 and \$35,000 a year while students pay \$15,000 to attend IDTSD.

"Their tuition covers everything, and there are no hidden costs. We cover all their supplies, all their trips, everything," Kealey said. "That's totally unheard of at design schools."

Savannah Boutch, 19, an IDTSD grad, said she worked two jobs while attending the institute to cover tuition.

"There were times that were stressful, but you just get it done because you have to," Boutch said. "I've been interested in interior design for a long time and had checked out different schools in the area, but I'm very hands-on. I like to learn what I need to know and move on."

Boutch graduated in May and was hired by a local design company, helping build floor design displays and assisting the sales team.

"I was thrilled," she said.

## 'Creative entrepreneurship'

Under Kealey's instruction, students also learn to weave together different areas of expertise and rethink what it means to be an entrepreneur.

"Our mission statement is 'Advancing educational opportunities through design exploration and creative entrepreneurship,'" Kealey said. "What's really unique about the program is that it's very entrepreneurial based."

Part of her curriculum involves pro-



Kateri Remmes and Anneliese Taggart work on sketches for handbags they are designing as part of a design boot camp for youths at the Institute of Design & Technology of South Dakota. ELISHA PAGE / ARGUS LEADER

gramming that develops both sides of the brain, emphasizing creativity and innovation while encouraging students to think as individuals.

"I don't believe in letting students use an eraser because I tell them every time you erase, you erase that train of thought and your ideas," Kealey said. "So keep doodling, keep making lots of thumbnail sketches because one of those sketches can become a solution or something wonderful."

The program also takes students off site, from the World Design Market in Las Vegas to meetings with at least a dozen local businesses.

"They are making contacts who could be potential employers, and they are also being mentored by owners of these companies that normally, with a bigger school, they would never get their foot in the door," Kealey said.

The institute has one paid employee. Kealey takes no salary and contributed her own resources to get the institute off the ground.

"Unfortunately, we still have overhead facility and equipment costs to run a school, but what's really nice is we provide all the students' supplies and try to keep it as affordable as possible," she said.

Tamisiea is making plans to start her own business, and her education with Kealey has brought her added confidence.

"For me, as an older student, you may-



Steph Tamisiea walks the runway with her daughters, Ella and Harper, during a fashion show for the Institute of Design & Technology of South Dakota. SUBMITTED IMAGE

be get filled with more self-doubt, especially when you're switching careers when you're 41. But she's so encouraging and tells us, 'Anything is possible if you set your mind to it and stick to it.'