

Uncovering Australia's design talent

IT IS A LONG HARD ROAD to get your designs into finished product and hanging on the racks of Australian or international boutiques, and ten times harder if you are living in an isolated or regional part of Australia.

But thanks to the efforts of the Textile Clothing and Footwear Resource Centre of Western Australia Inc. (TCFWA) and the Perth based Belmont Business Enterprise Centre Inc. – Small Business Centre Belmont (BEC-SBCB) many of Australia's aspiring designers are getting the assistance they need.

Carol Hanlon, Manager of TCFWA and Belmont BEC, is BEC Australia's Fashion Industry expert, having almost 40 years of experience both directly and indirectly within the Australian fashion industry. Carol operated her own fashion label and clothing factory in Geelong, Victoria for 20 years and appreciates many of the restraints of operating from a regional base.

Over the past 13 years Carol has run the Belmont BEC and eight years ago also established TCFWA. The only TCF Resource Centre of its kind operating in Australia, Carol is constantly receiving requests for assistance from across Australia from women who don't know where to turn to get their garments or products over those many hurdles in a complex and fast moving industry.

Western Australian Pinjarra based designer Barbara Matters, the designer behind the innovative indigenous label Karda Designs, is one of the many who has benefited from Carol's assistance.

"I have learnt a lot about the fashion industry and my business skills are developing through my constant networking with Carol," said Barbara. "Marketing my product has been easier and I have grown in confidence."

As the photo shows, Barbara's designs are extremely marketable. This label produces wearable art that is irreplaceable, sumptuous designs on sheer high quality silks, which are then manufactured into silk scarves, wraps and sarongs. The designs help to explain the food resources of the Australian bush and the nomadic lifestyle of the original inhabitants.

Each piece designed by Barbara and her daughter Kara tells its own story with no two pieces the same. Each is lovingly hand painted and made for storytelling in the traditional Australian indigenous style. Barbara and Kara design their pieces to educate the wider community, portraying the diversity of the Australian Aboriginal culture. Karda Designs produces a quality indigenous product hand made by indigenous women.

This year, a new story evolves with Karda Designs attending the Fashion Exposed event, Australia's largest business event for the fashion industry being held between March 11 and 13 at the Sydney Exhibition Centre, Darling Harbour. The event gives labels from across Australia the chance to promote their trans-seasonal and autumn/winter 2007 ranges to more than 12,000 trade fair visitors.

Cristina Moldovan, another designer who has benefited from the assistance of Belmont BEC and the TCFWA will also be showing her collection at Fashion Exposed. Her label, Aime Cristie is based on passion and love – a passion for style, art and creation, for the love of beautiful clothes designed for beautiful women. The labels catch cry is, "Passionate Women, Passionate Clothes."

Her collection houses an eclectic range of cocktail wear, casual wear and gallery pieces with each designer piece being artistic, sensual, romantic, vintage and timeless. Her cocktail wear is inspired by

her influences in younger years. The days of beautiful movie star women, days of glamour, elegance and grace. Some of her evening wear shows off her artistic skills even further with hand painted detailing.

The Aime Cristie label has been sold to boutiques in Ireland and Amsterdam and was exhibited at international fashion events in Europe and Ireland. Cristina exhibited at World Boutique Hong Kong and the Preview showcase and was invited to represent Australia at the Silk International Festival in China with her exclusive artistic collection of original special occasion pieces.

Originally from Transylvania, Cristina's rich history and background is clearly visible through her hand painted innovative and unique garments. She attributes a great portion of her success to the assistance given by Carol and her team.

"All the team from TCFWA are very nice, loving people who understand the needs of a starting designer," said Cristina. "They give you advice and assist you with whatever problem you come to them with. Carol and her team are also responsible for designedge outlets created to sell our products, as well as the new shop online project. These are just a few of their many contributions to enhance our businesses."

Designedge, to which Cristina refers, is the largest fashion incubator of its kind operating in Australia with over 70 designers showcasing their designs. designedge – TCF Australia designer showcase, is proudly supported by the Australian Government under the TCF Small Business Program, Textile Clothing Footwear Resource Centre of Western Australia (TCFWA), Belmont BEC – Small Business Centre Belmont (BEC) and designedge fashion incubator is also supported by the Belmont Forum Shopping Centre. ▶

Carol's new designedge online shopping project has seen the designedge fashion incubator launch online shops for emerging designers – this new shop online project can be viewed at www.designedge.net.au Requests have been arriving from designers and organisations from across Australia wishing to join the virtual designedge national network being planned, and discussions are currently underway to establish a second designedge fashion incubator in a major Perth CBD Shopping Centre.

Visitors to Fashion Exposed will be able to see the designedge first hand at Exhibition Stand 3651. Both Karda Designs and Aime Cristie will be there and will also be available for private showings or appointments.

To view further information on the featured collections of Karda Designs, Aime Cristie, Paperbark Woman, Bromelli, Colour Spirit, Rom Designs and Kimono Collections, visit www.tcfwa.com/fe2007s.html

If you are an aspiring designer or interesting in retailing Australian designers, BEC Australia, through Belmont BEC/TCFWA, can assist. Ask your local BEC about hosting a TCF forum or workshop – they are targeted to the textile, clothing, footwear and leather industry (TCF) which covers everything from fashion to blinds, tents, saddlery, schoolwear, manchester, carpets, rope etc (anything involving fibre or skin) and can be manufacturing, wholesale, retail and/or supporting services. The TCF Australia Business Skills project has a focus on indigenous, multicultural and young designers, but anyone operating a small business in the TCF industry is eligible to register.

There are also opportunities to receive free registration in a national TCF Directory being collated and a number of participants may receive one hour online sponsored business mentoring and a professionally prepared media release on their fashion label.



Karda Designs' Barbara Matters has been helped by the Belmont BEC to create an innovative range of Koori-based designs which are attracting wide interest

If you are already in the Australian fashion industry, Belmont BEC/ TCFWA can also be of assistance. TCFWA assists designers to exhibit at numerous international fashion events such as World Boutique Hong Kong, Kuala Lumpur Asia Fashion Week. TCFWA committee members showcase emerging Australian designers at top UK, European, and USA fashion events held in Paris, London, New York, Dublin and Düsseldorf.

They also conduct sourcing and overseas buying missions to assist Australian firms wishing to locate new suppliers, off shore manufacturers, trims and raw materials in Hong Kong and China. Anyone can join one of the TCFWA buying missions and participants may be eligible for three nights' free accommodation in Hong Kong.

TCFWA is also an accredited service provider with Indigenous Business Australia and provides many workshops and mentoring to talented indigenous designers and groups working in textiles

and fashion across Australia. It is working towards establishing a National Indigenous Textile, Clothing and Fashion Industry (ITCF).

Assisting women and communities to develop a small business in developing countries is also a focus of TCFWA Inc and under its TCF Global project is currently collecting used sewing machines, textiles and sewing accessories for a community sewing project for 110 community centres located in Ormoc, Leyte, Philippines this will assist women to develop their skills and start a new small business. ●

TCFWA Inc is a not for profit community based organisation supporting small business in the fashion, textile clothing, footwear and leather industries and is always looking for new supporters, sponsors, volunteers and industry mentors. If you would like to get involved in any of the TCFWA/ Belmont BEC projects visit www.tcfwa.com or email carol.hanlon@tcfwa.com