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Dover Clothing Library provides first-hand looks at second-hand attire

We aim to make borrowing secondhand, second nature,” said Stella McShera, the brains behind the Clothing Library in Dover, NH

Sophia Schlichtmann, Staff Writer

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On Dec. 1, the Dover Public Library (DPL) was perhaps the rowdiest it has been in the building’s 118-year history, with the exception of the children’s room, of course.

Loud pop music played as crowds filed in for a show that did not bear resemblance to storytime hour. Visitors stopped by a table with complementary, locally catered treats, such as Maine Root sodas and apple cider donuts on their way to find a view of the action. Soon they’d all be sitting on the edge of their seats to get a first-hand look at second-hand attire, modeled by librarians from all over the seacoast. Their jubilant, sassy and fierce struts would kick-off the newest addition to the building’s collection: The Clothing Library (CL).

The Clothing Library, the brainchild of Stella McShera, is a place where those living within a 15-mile radius of Dover, New Hampshire, can obtain a membership to check out articles of clothing for two weeks. All clothing from the library is sourced second-hand and includes a biodegradable dryer sheet to ensure it’s returned in clean condition. The library was officially launched on December 3, after the fashion show kick-off. McShera, who is currently getting her master’s in degrowth through the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, came up with the idea for the library a few years ago. However, it was not until the fall of 2023 that her idea took shape as a pilot project of her degrowth program.



JASON SHAMESMAN

Sophia Schlichtmann

Models taking their final walks in the CL fashion show’s third category: Get Dressed up to Get Down.

“The original idea and what has manifested are the same. I wanted to create a way people could access clothing without ownership and the traditional library model was the perfect way to do it,” said McShera. She said her master’s program reinforced the concept of less is more: the need to stop overproducing and over consuming. She stated that the library must fit the needs of the Seacoast community and that less stuff means more connection.

McShera moved to Newmarket, New Hampshire, from Los Angeles, California, to be closer to her in-laws. She stated that the atmosphere of LA lacked the type of connectedness that the New Hampshire Seacoast possesses.

“Here, I find people really value community and local initiatives more and knew once we decided to move back here this was the right community to bring life to the CL,” said McShera. “People seem to be really resonating with its mission.”

The Dover Public Library has held various events with focuses on sustainability such as Halloween costume and toy swaps around the holidays. However, the library’s Director, Denise LaFrance, noted that DPL has seen nothing quite like the CL. LaFrance stated that at the second meeting for establishing CL, Dover Public Librarians Patty Falconer and Emily Anaire were the ones who decided librarians should model for the show.

“One of the Library’s strategic goals is sustainability, so I was immediately intrigued with the idea,” said LaFrance. “We had 168 people attend the event and it was wonderful to see many of our regular library users.”

Eight weeks ago when McShera decided to launch CL for her thesis, she made a post on Facebook asking those interested in jumping on board to give her a call. Casey Philbrick, a New Hampshire resident with experience in marketing, called McShera and jumped feet-first into the project. Before the installation of CL, McShera and Philbrick spent their time curating pieces to go into the library by sorting through many donation bags.

“We went through to ensure everything was smell, stain and repair-free,” said McShera.

The clothing in the library ranges from sizes XXS to XXL. McShera stated that being size-inclusive was very important to her and Philbrick, and that they made sure each category included enough pieces that varied in size. She stated that CL will continue to take donations so the library can rotate out collections and keep them fresh.

As they sorted, McShera and Philbrick determined if the clothing in the bags met the category requirements of the fashion show. The fashion show had three categories: professional punk, winter wonderland and get dressed up to get down.

The first category, ‘professional punk,’ was themed to be anti-establishment with a focus on vintage, bespoke and luxury. For this category, models were outfitted in argyle sweaters, dress pants and other business wear. Models in the second category, ‘winter wonderland,’ dressed in outerwear and fuzzy boots. The third category, ‘get dressed up to get down,’ brought models in three-piece suits, glitzy gowns and flapper-like dresses.

The fashion show was equipped with a team of four makeup and hair artists from local salons, and a walking coach, Aqeel Hisham, who is a reporter for the news publication Seacoast Online. McShera saw Hisham on the runway for the sustainable fashion contest, Project Upcycle, that occurred earlier this fall in Portsmouth, and knew he was right for the CL show.

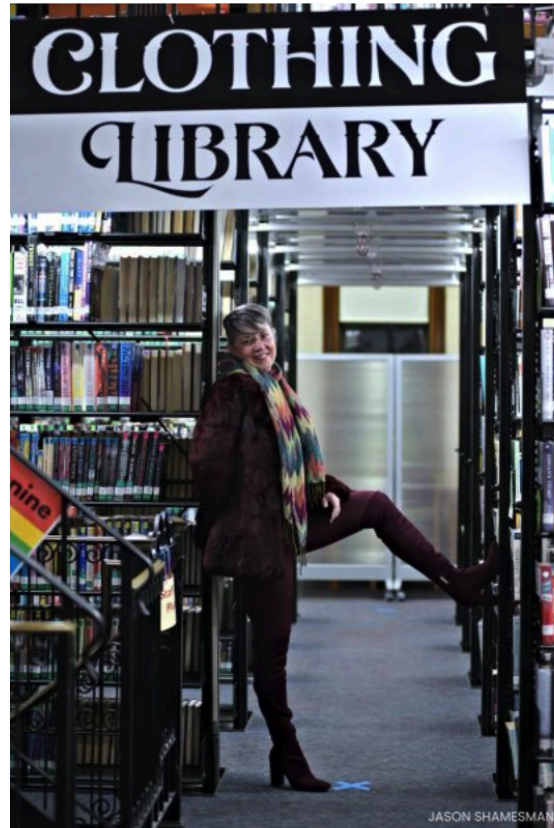
Doug Wright, librarian of Newmarket Library, said that walking in the fashion show improved his confidence. He did three or four runway walks in rehearsals for the show. Wright said he rehearsed less than his fellow models as he went through many outfits in search of the perfect look. He said that Hisham was a great help in training the models to strut within their 80-second rounds. Wright's friend Sheri, a former model herself, attended the show to cheer him on. Sheri was proud Doug volunteered for the event that was previously out of his comfort zone.

Lori Morse, librarian of Lincoln Street School in Exeter, who modeled for the CL, shared that the best part of the show was seeing all the outfits. Her love of fashion, and friend Crystal at the store New Moon in Durham, inspired her to volunteer for the show. Morse stated that knowing there would be people watching was nerve-racking, but that the walk-throughs in rehearsal and the CL team made her feel prepared. She is hopeful that CL inspires people of the Seacoast to be mindful about their purchases, and what they can reuse, borrow or thrift.

The makeup and hair team for the show consisted of Sara Chandler, and Arianna Plunkett from the Gallery Salon and Spa. Plunkett also runs AP Skin Society and teaches esthetics. From Jessica Todd Salon were Thea Jimenez and James Engstrand. Engstrand is also a teacher at Paul Mitchell The School and does hair styling with Kelly Ford Beauty in Exeter.

The team of stylists collaborated to find looks that fit the categories of the show. The goal of the artists was to find looks that were transitional and easily applicable through the wardrobe and theme changes of the show.

Working with McShera and the models were moments that all four artists highlighted when discussing their time preparing for the show.



Patty Falconer from Dover Public Library modeling a look within the Winter Wonderland category



The makeup and hair team: Sara Chandler (back left), James Engstrand (back right), Arianna Plunkett (front left), Thea Jimenez (front right) (Sophia)

“For only being with them [the models] for a short time, the day of the show really felt like I knew them all. The night of the event, all of them had their spirits high,” said Engstrand. According to him, seeing the models smile with their looks put together made the night shine.

“The best way I can describe my presence in the beauty world is that I’m versatile,” said Plunkett. “Everything I do in this industry involves an aspect of creativity, problem-solving, critical time management, organization skills and a love for helping people. Typically I’m not changing the makeup on my clients several times within a few minutes, but I enjoyed the excitement this offered during The Clothing Library fashion show,” she said.

Plunkett stated that while McShera had a few guidelines for the looks she overall gave her team free range as artists.

Plunkett and Jimenez worked together on finding looks that would transition easily to each category. Throughout the night Plunkett and Jimenez transitioned the models lip colors from bold pink, glossy iridescent rose, and bronze.

“I hope that this event was able to open people up to the world of fashion, hair and makeup. To show them that it’s not always scary or intimidating,” said Plunkett. “What we do is another form of art. As artists we find great joy in the fact that every canvas is different because that’s the beauty in it,” she said.

“The models’ confidence evolved so much from the moment I first met them until they walked down the runway,” said Chandler. She previously worked at New York Fashion Week earlier this fall. “It’s always amazing to see how beautifying someone can make them feel even more confident. I felt like we did a really wonderful job at giving them styles they wouldn’t normally wear while keeping it something that would make them feel comfortable and confident,” she said.

McShera spoke on her favorite piece from the library. She stated that the clothing her mother-in-law used during the show had special meaning to her.

“Emily, the model that started off the show, was wearing my mother-in-law’s pink Chanel-looking jacket. It was paired with a fast-fashion dress to demonstrate how to elevate a look. That jacket had a matching skirt and was worn as her post-wedding, off to her honeymoon outfit back in the 1960s,” said McShera.



Stella McShera, the brains behind The Clothing Library

The Clothing Library, located in the Lecture Hall at 73 Locust Street in Dover Public Library, will be running until mid-January 2024. It is open on Sundays from 1-5 p.m. and Mondays from 9-1 p.m. The library will be closed on the weekends of Dec. 24 and Dec. 31. After mid-January McShera will gather the data from the first installation of CL, and do a second pilot in the summer with a cluster of libraries to see what challenges and benefits would be faced by networking Clothing Libraries. The website for CL can be found [here](#).

“100 billion garments are produced every year globally and 92 billion go into landfill. The Clothing Library enables the seacoast to experience the sharing economy and hopefully through education and exploration in this community-focused endeavor, we can influence behavior change from buying to borrowing. By extending the life of clothing by 9 months, we can reduce our negative carbon and water footprint by 20 to 30 percent. We aim to make borrowing secondhand, second nature,” said McShera.