

# Passion for Fashion Competition generates excitement at American Sewing Expo

The American Sewing Expo is an independent consumer sewing show held annually at the Rock Financial Showplace in Novi, MI. Everything related to fashion sewing, quilting, needle arts, home dec, and crafting can be experienced through fashion shows, over 100 daily classes, make and takes, contests, live competitions and shopping the vendor floor featuring over 125 of your favorite products, patterns and sewing personalities.

One highlight of the Expo is Passion for Fashion. Similar to *Project Runway*, this live design challenge provides avid sewers the opportunity to showcase their sewing and design talents in a competition complete with professional models and a fashion show.

This year the 3rd annual Passion for Fashion competition was held September 25 and 26. After submitting their entry and a sewn garment, 12 finalists were selected from all over the country. Janet Pray, president of American Sewing Expo, Inc, said the goal of the challenge is to inspire all levels of sewers as they follow these designers through this two-day process. Open to professionals and amateurs, all ages are welcome to apply. Pray described one of the most interesting side effects of the challenge is the joy of watching contestants return and grow from their experience. Two of the contestants this year have been participating in ASE competitions since they were children and each has matured and grown in their sewing and designing skills.

One of the most difficult parts of the challenge for all involved was the anticipation of actually getting to Novi to compete. After arriving, finalists attended orientation the evening before the competition began. Everyone selected a professional model, took body measurements and set up their work station. Contestants brought their own sewing supplies and tools, including items such as thread, zippers, tape measure, drafting paper, muslin, scissors, and anything else used to sew a garment.

Friday morning everyone gathered in anticipation as the long awaited "secret challenge" would be revealed. From there each designer would create their own interpretation and design something reflective of their aesthetic and skills. The 2009 challenge was to design something for a supermodel attending a high fashion event in a location such as Paris or Milan. The twist was that she was secretly a CIA agent and everyone had to incorporate and hide a "spy" gadget in the garment. This gadget was the EZ Touch Keypad from RNK Distributing. Each designer would embroider a keypad on the garment and attach the gadget to the inside, concealing the model's identity.

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The designers were really enthusiastic about utilizing this product in their design and did so creatively.

Designers had 30 minutes to design their garment and then were given \$100 to buy fabric. There was a mad dash to find the perfect weaves, colors and textures and plenty of great

fabric suppliers to choose from.

Everyone sewed and designed from 9 a.m. to 7 p.m. on Friday, returned Saturday to sew from 9 a.m. until 3 p.m. when the models came back for fittings.

Quick adjustments and finishing touches were made and then judging and photo shoots began at 4 p.m. After a busy two days, the runway show started at 6 p.m. Each designer was presented on stage with their model and their one-of-a-kind garment creation. Excerpts from the Pink Panther and Mission Impossible created a spy ambiance during the show.

## And the winners are . . .

Third Place went to Cheryl Zemke of Riverview, MI, for her three piece ensemble. The coat (nicknamed "The Hepburn") had a high waist with fabric covered belt, wide cuffs and a striking collar. The under dress was a simple sheath design adorned with black lace and enhanced with an under slip also adorned with black lace meant to hang past the hem of the coat.

Second Place was awarded to Jennifer Simmons of Fayetteville, AR, for her body hugging evening gown made from a beautiful bold silk douppioni. She created an innovative arm wrap to conceal her spy gadget while focusing on a simple, yet striking design.

First Place was awarded to Joi Mahon of Sioux City, IA, for her trendy and hip party design. Each of the selected fabrics were manipulated in unique ways. The bodice was fully structured from the inside out in a silk window pane weave. In contrast to the bodice, the skirt (the business suit aspect) had varying angles of stripes, pleats and godets from a pin stripe suiting. Other accents included the pleated bodice band, grommet inserts, laces, ruching and self covered buttons topped off with a ribbon accent.

Sponsors of the design competition were very generous. Each winner received gift cards to fabric suppliers, books, and many other nice gifts. As the grand prize winner Mahon received the amazing Baby Lock Espire, a ASE NYC trip, and she will present her line of clothing at the



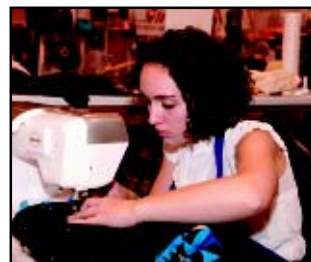
*Joi Mahon, right, poses with her model who is wearing the winning entry.*

2010 American Sewing Expo. Special thanks goes to Hamilton Beach for providing each contestant with their own Easy Touch Iron, RNK Distributing for the EZ Touch Keypads, Islander Sewing, Designer/Mentor Becky Fulgoni, Toby Haberman from Haberman Fabrics, Prym-Dritz, Chuck Islander Photography and the PFF Committee.

Here is what a few of the contestants had to say about participating:

**Erin Miller from Toledo, OH:** "This was my third year participating, and each year has been a different experience. I was very excited about this particular challenge as it was very creative and left room for each designer to be completely creative. Passion for Fashion has offered me great opportunities and I have looked forward to it every year."

*Miller is just finishing a business degree, but her true love is textiles. She will be starting a textile program soon.*



**Rosemary St. Clair from New Burn, NC:** "The biggest surprise was how friendly everyone was, and I liked watching how each design evolved. One of the most difficult parts was not knowing what types of fabrics were available. When I could not find the fabric I wanted I selected and alternate and went from there. The spy idea added an interesting kick to the challenge."



**Eve Kovacs from Chicago, IL:** Originally from Australia, Kovacs is no stranger to sewing competitions and has had a coveted position as a Bernina Fashion Show Designer. Interestingly, Kovacs is a physicist by day and moonlights as a well skilled, self taught seamstress. This was her second year with Passion for Fashion, and she has challenged herself by learning to sew under pressure and with time limits. She created a wrap dress concealing the EZ Touch pad in the closure overlap. Her inspiration was Armani with a contrast between feminine supermodel and the high-tech spy image.



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**Cheryl Zemke from Riverview, MI:** "As soon as we received the challenge I knew I wanted to design a coat that had some kind of artistic factor. I appreciate the ability to change the collar with the mood and that is so "me". The most challenging aspect was working within the \$100 budget, and adjusting the design quickly after the model fitting."

*Zemke is also a published author of a newly released children's book.*



**Joi Mahon from Sioux City, IA:** "I wanted to challenge my skills yet still be myself as a designer and have fun. I went in with the attitude that whatever the secret challenge was, I would go through the same thought/design process as I would with any of my design clients. I knew going in that I wanted a fun aesthetic reflective of my style, so when we received the challenge it was perfect. The bodice fabric was the very first I picked out and everything meshed from there. I love blending patterns, colors and fabrics in a fun way and you just know when something really works. My design was window pane, pinstripes and polka dots. The dotted ribbon itself was 1/3 of my budget and I consider that the focal accent of my design. I am so thankful to all the coordinators and sponsors for providing a wonderful experience for all participants."

**Jennifer Simmons from Fayetteville, AR:** "I thought the challenge was fun and creative, and I liked incorporating a real product with the Keypad. The vendors were easy to work with and had a great selection. The most difficult thing was the tight deadline, but it was made easy with the user friendly Baby Lock machines. Creating a great fit was important to me and something that looked truly made for the model representing my design aesthetic. Overall I had a great time working with everyone."

The American Sewing Expo will again be held in Novi, MI, Sept 24-26, 2010. For more information and to view a gallery of photos from this year's show, visit [www.americansewingexpo.com](http://www.americansewingexpo.com). 