

SATURDAY

March 28, 2009

Rain likely, storms possible  
High 47 Low 33

# IS SHE A RISING STAR? HIGHLAND NATIVE DESIGNS CLOTHES

LOCAL B1



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## Beauty from KayOss

Highland native shows  
off designs on Fashion  
Week runway in St. Louis

By MARY L. HEEREN  
Highland News Leader

**H**ighland native Amy Johnson's new career as a fashion designer fits like a well-made glove.

"I feel like I'm doing what I'm supposed to be doing," said Johnson, a 1988 graduate of Highland High School. "I feel completely alive."

Johnson became a full-time fashion design last fall and will be one of six Rising Star designers from the St. Louis area to showcase their work in a runway show at 1 p.m. today at Lumiere Hotel in St. Louis. The show is part of St. Louis Fashion Week, which ends Sunday.

The runway show is preceded by a luncheon. A market, to give everyone a chance to shop the designers' collections, will be open until 5 p.m. Tickets for the show are \$15, and the 11 a.m. luncheon costs \$35 per person.

The daughter of Arthur and Carolyn Johnson of Highland, Amy graduated with a civil engineering degree from the University of Illinois. Although she worked in that field for 15 years, she wasn't entirely happy.

Highland fashion designer Amy Johnson shows off her creations.

Please see KAYOSS, B3



### Designer

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"Everything kind of grows from there," she said. "Pieces, items and patterns come together."

Her love of fabric stems from her fashion design classes in Florence, Italy.

"They said, 'We're going to feel fabrics all day' and I thought, 'How boring,'" Johnson said. "But it's crazy the connection, how it feels, how it looks, how it drapes."

After finding a fabric, she acquires sample yardage and makes one item in a size four, the industry standard.

"I like getting reaction from people," Johnson said. If she can get enough material, she'll make up a range of sizes and show the work to area boutiques.

Currently, she does spring

and fall lines with skirts her biggest sellers.

"I do everything — organic tees, coats, sweaters, dresses and skirts," Johnson said. "The more you do, the more it grows."

Although she continues to do single pieces, she has now completed her first production of 120 skirts.

Johnson credits her background with part of her success:

"Highland was just a great place to grow up," she said. "I like the small town and the freedom to do more things, to run around."

Growing up in a rural area also may have influenced her work.

"Green is a staple in my designing, and I grew up in the country, in nature," she

said. "I'm sure it ties into it."

Johnson calls her company KayOss Designs, named for a figurative woman — Kay Oss — who follows her heart in a world of chaos, Johnson said, commenting on the word play.

"Life is chaotic," Johnson said. "This is the calmness within the chaos."

Johnson had decided on the name before she had a business.

"I always wanted my own company but I didn't know it was going to be related to fashion," she said. "Everything I do feels like it was meant to be."

In the runway show audience will be Johnson's parents plus other friends and relatives from Highland. KayOss Designs will be showing 12

full outfits, including her first pair of men's pants.

Her mother, Carolyn Johnson, thinks the young designer may have inherited her sewing talent from the previous generation.

"My mother loved sewing, quilting and materials so maybe that's where Amy gets it from," Carolyn Johnson said. "I never sewed; I didn't have the patience."

But the fashion world seems to be a good fit for her daughter.

"She has very good taste and has always liked clothes," Carolyn Johnson said. "We thought it was a big change but it's so exciting."

A description that her daughter echoes as she prepares for the upcoming fashion show.