

Highland woman's creations to hit Fashion Week runway

By Mary L. Heeren
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Highland 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 transitioned to 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. March 28 at Lumiere Hotel in St. Louis. The show is part of St. Louis Fashion Week March 23-29.

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 graduated with a civil engineering degree from the University of Illinois in Urbana/Champaign. Although she worked in that field for 15 years, she wasn't



HIGHLAND FASHIONISTA — Fashion designer Amy Johnson of Highland models one of her creations.

entirely happy. "I was trying to find a field I could be more creative in," she said. "I went to Italy for art classes and fell in love with fashion design."

The two aren't that different.

"Art and science are so

related," said Johnson who now lives in the Central West End of St. Louis.

"I use a lot of that (engineering) design aspect with fashion," she said.

"I'm taking the science and giving it flair," she said.

"I'm using my left brain and my right brain," Johnson said. "It's really helpful in showing what you want to get out there."

After a friend taught her to sew, her first piece was a pair of pants.

"Literally, 20 people came up and said, 'Where did you get those pants?'" she said.

Johnson started making more pieces and getting more feedback. She had her first fashion show in St. Louis in May 1996 and began participating in St. Louis Fashion Week last year. This is her fifth runway show.

Johnson became a full-time designer last fall.

She looks for material first. "Fabric is really important to me," she said.

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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."

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."