



# Fashion Forward

## A boutique crawl and runway show highlight Rochester's first-ever Fashion Week.

STORY BY MARY CHAO | PHOTOS BY MATT WITTMAYER

**M**aybe it's just a bad rap. Trends, they say, arrive here five years late. Conservative shoppers mean Talbots and St. John rule supreme. Fashion thrives in nearby Toronto and New York City, not here.

Meghan Mundy and fellow fashionista Chantiza Stern are determined to banish those notions with Fashion Week of Rochester, a three-day "fashion soiree" from Sept. 30 to Oct. 2. The event kicks off with a boutique crawl and wraps up with a big fashion show in the Memorial Art Gallery, with a second-day stop at Four Walls Gallery, where art will meet fashion and boutique vendors display their wares.

"Our idea is to showcase the best of the best in Rochester," says Mundy, 47, dubbed the chief fashion officer for the event.

Too many Rochesterians, she says, think they have to purchase their unique couture on out-of-town trips, but that just isn't necessary. So Fashion Week's boutique crawl—with buses ushering partygoers to local shops—will show off what Rochester has to offer. Sometimes, Mundy explains, we need a little push to discover what's in our own backyard.

What's in ours includes retailers such as Solia, Red Barn, Embrasse Moi, Tru by Nicole, Breathe Yoga, Chic Feet Boutique, Suzanne's, Cornell's Jewelers, Eye Candy and 2 Chic Boutique. (See page 50 for the festivities that participating stores are planning.)

So the event will cover a lot of ground, including a more "downtown" look at the fashion show at Four Walls Gallery in Rochester and a more upscale look at the closing-day show. When the lights dim on the finale, in the grand ballroom of the Memorial Art Gallery, models will strut in the latest in fall fashions and accessories, with jewelry from Cornell's to

accent the clothing and also menswear from Red Barn (think firefighters all dressed up).

Proceeds from Fashion Week will go to charity, with a goal of raising \$30,000.

The spark for the event came last year, when interior designer and jewelry maker Blynn Nelson approached Mundy about doing some type of fashion show in Rochester. Once Mundy and Stern teamed up (the Brighton residents met through Stern's linen rental business, Table Toppers of Rochester), planning took off.

"We both love fashion," says Stern, 40, serving as chief event organizer. "We just really work well together."

The last piece of the fabric was adding the "Art of Fashion" event, with local artist Shawn Dunwoody named "chief art director" for showcasing fashion in his gallery.

The team seems confident they've conceived an event that will last: Calling the three-day event a fashion "week" leaves room to grow in years to come. Stern says they considered a weeklong event, but for the inaugural year they wanted to keep things simple.

"We wanted people to go to all of the events," she explains.

They're confident for several reasons. Mundy—dressed in a pink Pucci-esque dress—says there's as much to offer when it comes to fashion in Rochester as the big cities. And a smaller city has its advantages. Shopkeepers really get to know you, and you develop relationships, she says, noting stores on the cutting edge such as Dado and Eye Candy. Her own personal-shopping and fashion-consulting business, In the Closet, thrives on personal service.

Nadine Ball, owner of Eye Candy in Rochester, was bitten by the Fashion Week bug early on.

"I'm part of Fashion Week because Meghan and Chantiza are so passionate about it," she says.

Rochester is conservative, Ball concedes. But she says there's room for niche stores such as hers. "You have to dig a little more to find a place like mine," she says.

Meghan Mundy (left) and Chantiza Stern of Brighton are the style forces behind Fashion Week. (Meghan Mundy's outfit is from Eye Candy, earrings from Cornell's Jewelers; Chantiza Stern's outfit and accessories, including Tory Burch clutch, are from Suzanne's Distinctive Fashions. Hair by Rocky Greco, makeup by Adam Revsen.)

“More people are taking risks with their style.”



Melissa Holthoff of Batavia in a black sequin dress from Eye Candy in Rochester.

For all model photos: Makeup by Jennifer Gelb and Lisa Glass, and hair by Jared Kane and Heather Weillert, all of the Spa at the Del Monte in Pittsford.

Ball is constantly fighting the perception that boutiques are expensive or that there's pressure to buy. But her store has items as low as \$12, and "there's always a sale table," she says.

Are local fashionistas buying in?

Brighton resident Heather Coles, 45, loves to shop at boutiques for the personal touch, frequenting A Different Point of View in Brighton (for Eileen Fisher clothes) and 2 Chic Boutique (for Israeli designers Ronen Chen and Roni Rabl).

A native of Toronto, Coles thinks her original hometown is edgier and trendier when it comes to fashion.

But in Rochester, "for the size of the city, there are a lot of shops," Coles says. Fashion Week, she says, could be just the thing to get the word out about all the little shops in Rochester.

Katelyn Ryan, an event planner who lives in the Park Avenue area, thinks the fashion scene is evolving in Rochester. "It seems that more people are taking risks with their style, which is something I feel is more typical of a larger city," says Ryan, 25.

Mundy and Stern are counting on that sort of thinking to get people inspired for Fashion Week. It's already working on Mundy herself. While organizing the event, she picked up a cute little furry vest from Eye Candy—"all the rage in fall fashion," she says, noting that impulse buys have become an occupational hazard as she visits the stores.

Another hot trend is the "jegging," a cross between the jean and the legging. Sonya Russell, co-owner of Solia boutique, plans to show off the tight jeans at the Fashion Week shows.

To add to the festivities down the road, Mundy says, they're considering incorporating a children's fashion show next year.

This year, proceeds will go to the Center for Youth Services—which helps teens in trouble and shelters homeless teens—and Chrysalis House, a safe haven for youths in trouble.

The \$30,000 goal is high for an inaugural event, Stern readily admits. But the response from the community so far has been promising. Retailers such as Cornell's Jewelers and Dorschel Automotive Group signed on early as event sponsors. There are several levels of sponsorships: For as little as \$50, a boutique could have a presence at the Art of Fashion day at Four Walls Gallery, Mundy says.

For the general public, tickets start at \$15 for standing room at the fashion show and \$75 for front-row seating with champagne. Tickets are \$15 at the Four Walls downtown fashion show and sale. The boutique crawl is free.

Much of what it takes to put the event together has been donated as gifts in-kind—a tribute to local nonprofits and businesses that want to support both local retail and local youths, Stern and Mundy say.

And the overall theme, of course, is all local as well.

"There's a lot here," Mundy says. "People need to shop locally."

For more information and updates, visit [www.fashionweekofrochester.com](http://www.fashionweekofrochester.com).

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#### Need more?

If you're hankering for another fashion fix, Dado Boutique in Rochester will be putting on a fashion show soon after Fashion Week, on Oct. 19, at Good Luck Restaurant, 50 Anderson Ave., Rochester. The show will feature the latest in fall fashions from Dado, plus jewelry from Mann's Jewelers. Doors open at 6 p.m. and tickets are \$20 to \$60. All proceeds will benefit the Wilmot Cancer Center.

For information, call 271-7890.

Turn the page to see more of our photo shoot with some of the Fashion Week models



A rehearsal with summer outfits from two of the participating stores took place at the Memorial Art Gallery in July. For Fashion Week, it'll be all-new fall outfits.



(Opposite page) Simone Boone of Rochester in a mauve belted dress and white hat with side embellishments. (This page) Amy Bell of Penfield in a black-and-white-striped dress. Both outfits are from Eye Candy.



## Party buses and boutiques

I have to admit: Buses aren't my cup of tea when it comes to going out for a night on the town. But Meghan Mundy, chief fashion officer of Fashion Week 2010, asks me to use my imagination.

Use of the chartered buses, being used exclusively for the Sept. 30 boutique crawl, was donated, helping to keep the crawl free. Think music and women dressed to the nines and sharing fashion tips with new friends you've met on the bus, Mundy says.

I'm a little more convinced as I hear how participating boutiques are pulling out all the stops to make the experience memorable. Models wearing chunky jewelry made with natural stones will be strolling through TRU by Nicole in Pittsford. The store is teaming up with Embrasse Moi lingerie for a fashion show during the event. Women in fancy lingerie outfitted with bold jewelry? We're getting warmer.

TRU also plans to serve gourmet chocolates, fruits and drinks to visiting fashionistas.

Stop by Eye Candy and you'll be able to groove to a disc jockey pumping out music while you sip Moët & Chandon Champagne.

Solia in Pittsford will have drinks and finger foods as well as local artists to talk about their jewelry. One tentatively scheduled artist is Joan Nichols, a Penfield artist who makes vintage shabby chic jewelry.

The dozen or so stores along the crawl are coming up with their own plans on how best to entertain their guests, Mundy says.

And, of course, riding the bus is optional; guests can get to the stores on their own. But then they'll be missing the party bus.

- Mary Chao



Melissa Holthoff (left) of Batavia wears a top from Breathe Yoga. Amy Bell of Penfield wears a top and leggings from Breathe. (Opposite page) Carly Weis of Pittsford shows off a yoga top and pants, also from Breathe Yoga.



Simone Boone wears a red plaid shirt and jeans from Breathe Yoga.



**“There’s a lot here.  
People need to  
shop locally.”**

Brooke Stulpin of Chili models a red floral shirt, jean capris and an overshirt from Breathe Yoga.