

Marilyn Strosberg, co-proprietor of Sand Dollar Designs, rents a spot at Shop 607.



(Photo: KATIE SULLIVAN / Staff Photo)

Marilyn Strosberg, of Vestal, grew up with a passion for accessorizing and a full length mirror conveniently attached to her hip: her twin sister, Marlene Ashmore.

“We’ve always been into accessories,” Strosberg said. “I’ve always loved jewelry, so accessories have always been really important.”

Though neither sister has ever sewed, the twins share a fashion sense they’ve carried throughout their careers as teachers — Strosberg taught elementary education for 25 years and now substitute teaches in the Johnson City school district — and as more and more people complimented what they were wearing, the twins recognized an opportunity to share their passion with others.

Strosberg and Ashmore, who lives in the Midwest, created Sand Dollar Designs in 2013, designing custom dresses, skirts, tunics, leggings, seasonal and formalwear for women in a wide range of sizes, with all machine-washable and wrinkle-free fabrics — including stretch knit, lycra, stretchable, taffeta and velour — as well as a focus on being custom, comfortable and flattering.

“We like to make people feel good about themselves,” Strosberg said.

That is particularly true for women over the age of 40, who Strosberg said are generally concerned with covering up. For them, Strosberg creates custom garments that fit to flatter.

“My mother always said ‘hide the sins,’” Strosberg said. “So I’ve always incorporated ‘hiding the sins’ into designs.”

That can mean any number of variations. Different hem and sleeve lengths, custom waistlines and fabrics, Strosberg said, create a completely different look.

“It can be a whole new ballgame,” Strosberg said.

For instance, Strosberg and Ashmore have specific fashion concerns as teachers.

“We want to be comfortable when we teach,” Strosberg said. “I want my keys and my phone on me.” That has led to the utility skirt, with zippered pockets for someone who wants their personal items easily accessible.

That intuition stems from a lifetime of interaction between twin sisters who have developed a routine of enhancing each other’s style.

“I’m a reflection of her,” Strosberg said, “so what she sees on me, she thinks, ‘I’m going to improve that.’ She helps me get out of my box.”



Sand Dollar Designs include dresses, skirts, tunics, leggings and formalwear. (Photo: KATIE SULLIVAN / Staff Photo)

With Sand Dollar Designs, Strosberg stresses the importance of a one-on-one experience, replicating that same interaction to motivate self-confidence. It's important to Strosberg that women not think they can't wear certain garments.

"We try to go out of the box a little bit," she said. "We offer a tunic, but a tunic can be a cowl neck, a scoop neck, or a v-neck, and a different sleeve length is going to be a whole different idea."

She creates measure-to-fit custom garments to flatter women of all shapes and sizes from extra-small to plus size, designed at a personal consultation at her rented space in Shop 607 in the Northgate Plaza on Upper Front Street in Binghamton or wherever the wearer is most comfortable meeting. Sand Dollar Designs also has a measurement tutorial video on its website.

"It's a one-on-one experience," Strosberg said. "If someone's disabled in some way, or maybe they've had a mastectomy, we can create a garment for them. A lot of people don't like to shop, and this helps them with that."

Strosberg hopes the designs also help to boost confidence. She is a member of [Polka Dot Powerhouse](#), a business and networking organization which has chapters worldwide, founded to build connections and spread positivity. The cause inspires Strosberg.

"It keeps people motivated to do what they're doing," she said. "It's all positive reinforcement. I think it's important that you keep up with things, and that clothes can help you. I have a passion for it."

Sand Dollar Designs is the product of Strosberg and Ashmore's twin passions for fashion and boosting confidence.

"I want people to feel good about what they're wearing," Strosberg said.

Follow Katie Sullivan on Twitter @ByKatieSullivan.

Marilyn Strosberg

Age: 59 **Home:** Vestal **Hometown:** Madison, Wi.

Education: bachelor of arts in elementary education, University of Wisconsin

Family: husband, Jeff; daughter, 28; son, 25; twin sister, Marlene Ashmore

Hobbies: reading, socializing, walking, [Polka Dot Powerhouse](#) member

Where to find her: sanddollar designsusa.com