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- Books
- Clubs
- Comedy
- Dance
- Film
- Gay & Lesbian
- Home & Living
- Kids
- Museums & Culture
- Music
- Opera & Classical
- Restaurants & Bars
- Sex & Dating
- Shopping
- Spas & Gyms
- Sports
- Theater
- Travel
- TV & DVD

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# Museums & Culture

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## Talking swap

Simultaneous clothing swaps raise funds for an arts organization.

By Jamie Murnane

*Project Runway* may be over, but now it's time for you to make it work. Swap-O-Rama-Rama, a roaming clothing swap-cum-design challenge offers fashion-forward folks and DIYers a chance to get off the couch and create. On Saturday 29, participants can swap their old glad rags, and then alter their new goods on the spot. Originally conceived as interactive performance artwork, the swap comes to West Loop's AV-aerie to raise funds for an Illinois arts organization.

In 2005, Wendy Tremayne threw the first Swap-O-Rama-Rama at a cultural center on New York's Lower East Side. An artist, Tremayne created the swap as a daylong alternative to consumerism—giving participants the space and tools to alter old or newly swapped clothes rather than buy new ones. The sociopolitical clothing fete was written up in a craft magazine in August and caught the eye of Jennie Hawkey—all the way out in Chillicothe, Illinois. A board member of her town's Three Sisters Park, Hawkey needed a fund-raiser to start a folk arts school, and Swap-O-Rama-Rama sounded promising.

She shared the article with her daughter, 25-year-old Chicago resident Katie Hawkey. Since Tremayne encourages others to restage their own Swaps, the Hawkeys began plotting. "I said we could get three times as many people in Chicago," Katie says. "There's such a strong crafting community here."

So the two decided they'd hold two Swap-O-Rama-Ramas—one in Chicago and one 140 miles southwest in Chillicothe—to raise money for Three Sisters Folk Art School. The education center, Katie says, will offer classes for all ages in folk arts like knitting, weaving, pottery and painting.

"We're reclaiming the making of things—clothes, food, whatever—and finding a balance of modern life," she says. "We want people to see that crafting is something that is fun and you can find enjoyment in—that it really is a leisure activity."

And it's the crafting that makes the event different from Swap-O-Rama-Ramas before it. "I've had friends who've participated in swaps and said only 10 percent of the people participate in a reconstruction aspect—but that's going to be huge here," Katie says. For folks wary of creating anything, several experts are on hand to help guide participants with their alterations, screenprints and embellishments. Pros man around a dozen sewing machines, and silk screens will be set up so that printing-newbies can easily swipe a design onto a shirt or tote.

After all is said and redone, an informal runway show kicks off, allowing participants to flaunt their new and improved garbs in a walk-off.

Katie says Tremayne mandates that Swap-O-Rama-Rama events forgo mirrors, ensuring that attendees turn to their neighbor to ask, "How do I look?" or "Does this go together?" It ultimately results in striking up conversations and new friendships, which adds to a community-building aspect that Tremayne hoped to establish and that Katie wants to continue in Chicago. "It forces people to engage with one another," Katie says. "It's a real community builder."

As for the fund-raising aspect, the entry fee is a bag of clothing and a suggested donation (\$20 or \$10 for students and seniors.) "We're not going to turn people away," Katie says. "Bring clothes, get a chance to clean out your closet—it's good for the environment to not create massive amounts of waste—and walk away with all the clothes you can carry."

*Swap-O-Rama-Rama needles its way into AV-aerie on March 29 and at the Three Sisters Park in Chillicothe on April 12, both swaps 10am–5pm.*



LIFE'S A STITCH Swap-O-Rama-Rama participants are sew excited to alter their clothes.



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