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By Associated Press, Published: October 25

NEW YORK — "If you can drive a car, you can drive this," says Maya Valladares as I press the sewing machine pedal to the floor and complete my first stitch.

After years of having holes in my pants pockets, I am finally learning to fix one.

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(Sean O'Driscoll / Associated Press) - In this Sunday, Sept. 11, 2011 photo, Sean O'Driscoll fixes his pants pockets at the Brooklyn chapter of Sewing Rebellion in New York.

The process is more complicated than I suspected: Carefully cutting through three layers of stitches to remove the pocket lining requires the precision and patience of a surgeon.

This is my first class with Sewing Rebellion, a group with chapters springing up across the country. Its aim is to promote the reuse and repair of clothing as a way to fight consumer waste.

In Brooklyn, it provided use of sewing machines, needles and thread, and offered instruction and almost infinite patience for beginners.

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Valladares herself hasn't bought any new clothes in more than two years.

"A guilty energy develops — you stop buying because of the waste, and you can't go back to the way you were," she says.

But is it for men? I'm the only male among 12 women in this New York group.

"I can't believe it," says Valladares as she reshapes my pocket. "A roomful of women? And guys aren't interested?"

Maybe if sewing were pitched to men as rugged survivalism, it might attract more interest. "Definitely, if men could see it that way, they would show up," says Valladares. "They should see it as a survival tool."

Sewing Rebellion was created by Carole Lung-Bazile of Los Angeles to, well, sow rebellion against consumerism with the slogan "Use it up! Wear it out! Make it do!"

Besides protecting the planet, says Lung-Bazile. "I wanted to honor the labor that created these clothes. We buy clothes cheaply and throw them away. We don't see the worker who put all that effort into creating it."

After struggling for an hour to undo those three interlocked layers of stitches and remove my pocket lining, I know what she means. Using the old one's outline, Valladares showed me how to trace out a new pocket lining, insert it into my pants and re sew. "Clothes have memory," she says. "You have to reshape according to what was already there or it's going to be lumpy."

Lung-Bazile, who takes the mock-heroic name "Frau Fiber" when promoting Sewing Rebellion, has a history in the fabric industry - she worked for 15 years for a small bridal house in Lancaster, Pa., before losing her job during an economic slump. "I was assistant designer, production manager, I hired the models. I did it all. I really got to know the clothing industry and what it takes to get those clothes to you," she says.

Other groups are sprouting up across the country, including Hacking Couture in New York City and Stitchy in Chicago. Participants are often drawn by a desire for camaraderie, increased environmental awareness and, of course, economic hard times.

Ecouture, as the trend for eco-friendly reuse of clothes is known, is also the subject of pun-loving blogs including "Sew Chic," "Sew Liberated" and "Sew Retro," and many YouTube tutorials.

Wendy Tremayne discovered untapped demand for sewing when she launched "Swap-O-Rama-Rama" in 2005. For a small donation, you can exchange clothes and join repair and redesign classes.

"I got requests from 20 U.S. cities on how to set it up, and now it's in Istanbul, Jerusalem, all over the world. It's been phenomenal," says Tremayne.

She believes that reusing garments is far more sustainable than recycling them, and a lot more fun.

"That's why we attracted so many people," she says. "This isn't just about stitching — it's a way of life. More and more people want a creative outlet. If you can save the planet while doing it, even better."

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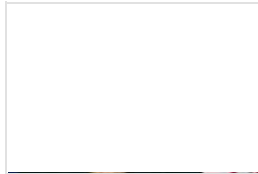
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