

Sewing wizard helps you be whoever you want to be



Upstairs at Joyce Lapenskie's is a world apart, a world of tremendous creativity, talent, hard work and simple joy, where Daisy Duck rubs elbows with Elvis and candy canes mix it up with dinosaurs and Sumo wrestlers. She has costumes for everybody, young and old, large and small. PATRICIA McLEE Special to This Week

By Patricia McLee

When Joyce Lapenskie hangs her wash, you just never know who might come waltzing out on the line.

Could be a Ninja Turtle or an elf. Could be Donald and Daisy or Mickey and Minnie. Could be Santa and his missus or Elvis, or a clown, or a Smurf or a dinosaur.

They're all just a small sample of the hundreds of costumes she has created over the years.

And this is their time of the year to shine.

From just before Thanksgiving to early in the New Year, Lapenskie's 500 to 600 costumes are on display upstairs in her house, ready to be chosen for that special occasion when you just have to dress up.

While the witches and devils and such usually retire back to their containers after Halloween, a host of other costumes remain available for parades, holiday parties and special events. A few years ago, she had 75 costumes in the Barry's Bay Christmas Parade.

Lapenskie got into the costume business some 20 years ago when a friend offered to sell her costume inventory to her for \$100.

That first batch of costumes completely filled her Intrepid, Lapenskie recalls. "From there it just snowballed," she said. Now the children of the children who have worn her costumes are coming in to choose who they will be for Halloween.

Many of the costumes she makes each year are special orders. Auctioneer Preston Cull requires a new costume every St. Patrick's Day, Beechburg's Art Jamieson once needed to be a chicken, Ruth Cull wanted to be a clown for the cancer patients at CHEO and Dr. Denise Coulas asks for something new every year.

"Just surprise me, she says," Lapenskie laughs. She also created the top hat and suit for David Kelley for the Rockingham Church services and the Flintstone costumes for a recent Barry's Bay ice skating show.

Five of her Hershey's Kisses went to Toronto and won a prize, her teletubbies went off to St. Catharines, one Elvis costume made it all the way to California for a seminar, Snow White and the dwarfs travelled to Kingston, and every year she makes new costumes for her grandchildren in British Columbia.

While she doesn't draw, Lapenskie has thousands of patterns and she sometimes uses the Internet to get an idea of what a costume should look like. "Just give me a picture and I'm OK," she said. "If you want it and I don't have it, I will make it."

"I have to be pretty creative some times," she added. She said she will go out of her way to make sure people get the costumes they want because it makes her feel good.

All of the costumes she rents come complete with wigs, gloves, halos, crowns, wings, cane, a ball and chain, or whatever it takes to

make it perfect. ?If it needs a hat, it has a hat,? she said.

While the costumes have blossomed from a hobby to a passion, they are by no means the only sewing projects Lapenskie takes on. She also makes Christening gowns and tuxedos and she made all of the bridal party dresses for the weddings of her children.

Lapenskie has been sewing since she was a child. She remembers she had to stand up to use her mother's treadle machine because she couldn't reach the foot pedal.

While she still has that treadle machine, Lapenskie's sewing room, the one with the hand-painted door by son Jason, boasts a total of seven sewing machines, three sergers and a pressing machine, with dozens of pegs on the wall for a rainbow of coloured thread.

Semi-retired now, Lapenskie works at St. Francis Memorial Hospital part time but still sews from about 5 to 6:30 a.m. most days and again in the evening until she starts making mistakes, but never on Sundays.

?I could do worse things, and it's always fun.?