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ARTS & LIFESTYLES

14th annual Women's Expo in Centereach

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COVER STORY

Long Island women share their creations

Middle Country library to host 14th annual expo

BY DONNA NEWMAN

“Follow your passion.” That’s the motivational theme that links the 84 women entrepreneurs who will display their wares at this year’s Women’s EXPO, to be held Thursday, Oct. 2, from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m., at the Middle Country Public Library in Centereach. Now in its 14th year, this annual event transforms the library into a marketplace of products and services, art and crafts, specialties and one-of-a-kind items created, imported and marketed by Long Island women.

“It’s a perfect way to jump-start your holiday shopping — or to treat yourself to something very special,” said Elizabeth Malafi, coordinator of the library’s Miller Business Center. “Last year’s EXPO drew a record-breaking 2,600 attendees. We’re hoping for an even larger turnout this year.”

“Visitors are always enthralled by the size and scope of the EXPO,” said MCPL Library Director Sophia Serlis-McPhillips. “The underlying current of the day is a kind of camaraderie that is warm and supportive. Each of the women participating has made her own unique journey, and the stories they share are positively inspiring.”

Lisa Mintz loves to create pottery. It’s been her hobby for the last decade. Her favorite creations are mugs. “I loved giving them as gifts,” she said. But with a “day job,” her creativity remained in the background. “About a year ago, I was at a crossroads,” she said. “I gave somebody a mug as a gift, and somebody else saw me give it and said, ‘I’d like to order some of those.’ And I said, ‘I don’t sell them.’” It got her thinking.

Along with pottery, she sells philosophy. Her business is called Cups of Relaxation and on the bottom of each is an inspirational phrase. “My vision is that people will use their mug, drink their favorite beverage and give themselves permission — for a few minutes each day — to just relax.” She thinks it makes a world of difference.

Mintz’s fledgling business, CSH Designs, debuted at the Restoration Farm stand in Old Bethpage this summer. A friend suggested she apply to the Women’s EXPO because it isn’t just a one-time event; it provides business support to women year round. “I attended a workshop for exhibitors. It was wonderful,” said Mintz. “There was a lot of networking. I met other entrepreneurs. We got photography tips and a lot of support. I felt great when I left there, and inspired.” *Find what inspires you*, is one of many sayings she writes on the bottoms of her mugs. She admits it takes a lot of courage to do that — but it seems to be working for her.

Angelica Cocha loves her native land of Ecuador, where her family still resides, and her field of study — sustainable agriculture. Put them together and her business, EcoVogue, is the result. Cocha designs and im-



Photos by Sal DiVincenzo

Clockwise from top left, Leslie Concialdi; Vivian Jarrett; Lisa Mintz; and Angelica Cocha

ports a line of colorful jewelry, handcrafted by artisans using nuts and seeds. The business is founded on four principles: preserving the environment, assisting the local Ecuadorian economy both socially and financially, and satisfying the customer’s desire for quality eco-friendly products.

Cocha left home at 17 to study at Earth University in Costa Rica, and eventually took an internship in the U.S. at age 23 with the goal of improving her English. While here, she met her husband, decided to stay and raise a family. When she began researching her business, she said, “I realized that mostly the people that sell these products here are Americans. So they are helping, but it’s not like our people doing it. Somebody has to help from overseas, but we need to encourage our own people to [be more self-sufficient].”

Cocha is doing just that. She is currently working on adding a new line to the business. “I have a daughter who loves jewelry,” she said, “and mostly what you find (if you

don’t buy gold or silver) is plastic for the kids. So my next goal is to develop an eco-friendly children’s line for girls.”

Leslie Concialdi loves wine corks. “I love the way they look. I love the textures of them; the organic feel of them. And I also hate that they’re going the way of the landfill. I hate that they’re [being replaced by] plastic and twist tops. Cork is a sustainable resource when harvested correctly. It’s a fallacy that we’re running out of cork.”

Since her retirement from the NYPD, she’s had more time to pursue the creative side of life. Her art involves the recycling of wine corks into useful and decorative items for home and garden. Her product line includes coasters, trays, corkboards, key chains and birdhouses — one of which was featured in the magazine *Birds & Blooms* last year, making for a very busy Christmas season. She’s been marketing as Leslie’s Cork Creations through an online shop on Etsy.com since 2012.

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— SOPHIA SERLIS-MCPHILLIPS

This will be Concialdi’s third year at the EXPO. “It’s all women, which is nice,” she confided. “It empowers women to work for themselves — and it provides some wonderful networking opportunities. People are kind enough to take a card and they really do reach out to me and say, ‘I have a bunch of corks for you. Want to come get them?’” Her suppliers of corks include friends who own restaurants and many of the vintners on Long Island’s North Shore. She purchases corks from West Coast wineries online.

Vivian Jarrett loves to cook. “Being Puerto Rican,” she said, “it’s all about food. It’s about getting together with family — the making of our traditional dishes takes a lot of us around the table. I make sofrito — it’s our cooking base for everything. It’s like a Spanish pesto.” It was one of the staples that she always made, and her friends always asked her to “make extra” so she could share it with them. And she did.

Jarrett was a “stay-at-home” mom, raising two little ones, when her mother passed away in 2013. “I needed something to distract myself,” she said. “I saw a cooking competition at the Garden of Eve, an organic farm in Riverhead. It was called ‘The Next Garlic Iron Chef.’ She decided to enter, using her sofrito and mojo — a raw garlic sauce. Her dish was tostones with camarones (shrimp and plantains) — a simple dish, considered peasant food. She won the competition and got rave reviews! A business opportunity presented itself, and, with the support of her husband and best friend, she started Tainos.

She now sells her sauces, which she proudly notes are “clean and organic and fresh — no preservatives” — at farmers markets in Port Jefferson and Riverhead (which now operates a year-round, indoor market on Saturdays.) Growing the business will be challenging, as her product has a shelf life of about a week to 10 days. For now, she is thrilled to be able to share her heritage and her family recipes with a growing population.

Admission to the EXPO is free. Lunch will be available for purchase from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. in the EXPO Café, catered by Fifth Season of Port Jefferson. Local baked goods will be offered in the Tea at Half-Past-Three space. The library is located at 101 Eastwood Blvd., Centereach. For information, call 585-9393 ext. 296 or visit www.womensEXPOLi.org.

Photo by Sal DiVincenzo

On the cover: From left, Vivian Jarrett, Angelica Cocha, Lisa Mintz and Leslie Concialdi