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ARTS & LIFESTYLES

Women's Expo

returns to Middle Country
Public Library • B7



Women's Expo returns to Middle Country Library

Oct. 6: A day to celebrate LI women, promote economic independence, and *shop!*

BY DONNA NEWMAN
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On Oct. 6 the Women's Expo will once again transform the Middle Country Public Library's quiet atmosphere into a bustling marketplace, with vendors displaying a wide variety of goods. As its name implies, the vendors all have gender in common. This annual event, now in its 11th year, celebrates women entrepreneurs, artists and artisans as it offers them a venue to meet, support, and learn from each other. It's a great opportunity for the rest of us to find unique holiday gifts — or to be inspired by some amazing women and their stories.

Elizabeth Malafi, MCPL Coordinator of Adult Services and the Miller Business Resource Center — and the lead organizer of the Women's Expo — is continuing the event's focus on diversity. Her committee reviews vendor applications that arrive each year with an eye toward assembling a broad range of products that demonstrate quality, uniqueness and variety in pricing. She strives to achieve a mix of ethnicities and ages among exhibitors.

"The Expo has grown so much over the past 10 years," said Malafi, "from a handful of vendors to more than 80 — and we hope to continue that upward trend. We are pleased that the Expo continues to be a way for women entrepreneurs to meet each other." The event remains fresh — even into its second decade — thanks to the inclusion of new vendors each year. Of the 81 women exhibiting this year, 25 are new to the Women's Expo.

Here's a sampling of the women you'll meet at this year's Expo and the items they'll be offering:

Cherie Prisco

Cherie Prisco started her business soon after her son was born. Her first fabric accessories were baby bibs and burp cloths and her brand name is a whimsical reference to her son and a favorite song — "Jimmy Pickles." As time went by, necessity mothered another product idea: a wrist key-chain to allay Prisco's fear that she'd lock her keys in the car — with the baby! Moms found it an excellent solution. At about the same time, she found the then-new web marketplace for handmade products, Etsy, and her business sprouted wings.

After Prisco attended the Women's Expo four years ago as a customer, she decided to apply to be an exhibitor. "It's the gold standard for craft fairs," she said, "such a really good diverse mix of



Photos from the Middle Country Public Library
Farrah LaRonde-Hutchison

merchandise and vendors. They're so helpful and organized — really tuned in to what vendors need." Her offerings now include eyeglass cases, coupon clutches, checkbook covers, coin purses and larger purses in vintage and designer fabrics — all handmade by Prisco. "It's really been fun having this creative outlet that lets me be home with my son."

Schery Markee Sullivan

Fine artist Schery Markee Sullivan makes her debut at the Women's Expo this year at the recommendation of a client, who paired the artist with this venue to facilitate networking and increase her exposure. Sullivan will display her watercolor paintings and prints as well as a selection of handmade individual and boxed cards, and ornamental décor (painted shells and rocks).

Sullivan's formal training began at New York University, where she studied with famed abstract painter, professor and author Robert Kaupelis. "Creativity is my life force," she said, "and I work every day as a painter to express that gift ... the energy, passion and color of my work is a direct reflection of my heart and soul. It is a constant working, dynamic and layered, a tangible and intangible connection to the world." Her watercolors are a bold expression of color, line, and vibrant energy, depicting elegant florals, intricate mask collages, abstract and primitive creature pieces and powerful figurative subjects.

Farrah LaRonde-Hutchison

Another first-timer at the Expo is Farrah LaRonde-Hutchison, founder of Gaia's Essence, selling loose teas and salt-free seasoning blends. "Our goal," said LaRonde-Hutchison, "is to provide affordable, nutritious options so everyone can enjoy a happy, healthy life." Born and raised on the Caribbean

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island of Dominica, known for biodiversity and its significant centenarian population, she has great respect for nature, the environment and "the power of natural, healthy living."

A scholarship took her to the University of New Orleans where she studied environmental science. Following Hurricane Katrina, she migrated to Long Island and completed her bachelor's degree at Dowling. In the spring of 2007, sensing a market for the loose teas of childhood, she started a business, importing and selling teas that promote and enhance well-being. Eventually, she added a line of seasonings. Her products come in ecofriendly packaging — and carry a satisfaction guarantee.

Clever marketing combines the ease of online ordering with the personal touch of home tasting parties. In addition to finding her own niche, she offers women an opportunity to become wellness leaders in their families and communities, enabling the financial freedom that can change lives.

Leslieanne Beller

Leslieanne Beller holds advanced degrees in counseling and psychology. In her work she combines meditation and knitting into a healing art. "My Mom taught me to knit when I was 9 and I've been knitting ever since," she explained. It brings her a kind of peace and renewal. When she added beads to her knitting to create unique jewelry items, Sereba Designs was born.

"Beads make us smile," she said. "They've been used for centuries to adorn people of all cultures. Color sets a mood. Along with crystals and natural stones it is said to have healing properties — promoting a sense of well-being, positive energy, prosperity, inner calm, good health and a loving spirit ... I combine colors, hues and tones with texture for a wildly jubilant [look]." One of Beller's specialties is creating custom jewelry for brides and bridal parties.

Two years ago, Beller opened a virtual shop on the Etsy website and has been selling her jewelry online ever since. She also packages "Knit Kits" — complete with instructions and materials — for do-it-yourselfers. In addition to sales, she is a published author (her "Beaded Bracelets to Knit" is in the Leisure Arts series) and workshop instructor (Knitting Jewelry with Beads). Two of her original bracelet designs were selected for inclusion in the upcoming edition of "The Encyclopedia of Knitting" (to be published in December).

Women's Expo will take place at the Middle Country Public Library, 101 Eastwood Boulevard in Centereach from 11 am to 6 pm on Thursday, Oct. 6. Admission is free. Lunch is available for purchase in the Expo Café between 11 am and 3 pm, with catering by Fifth



Schery Markee Sullivan

Season of Port Jefferson. The Tea-at-Half-Past-Three Meet the Author event features Starr Cline, Ed.D., and her book, "The Power of Yes." Cline will speak about the importance of developing personal creativity as a means of unlocking human potential.

For further information call the library (585-9393, ext. 296) or visit www.womenssexpoli.org.

On the cover:

Photos from the Middle Country Public Library

Top row, Gaia's Essence (Farrah LaRonde-Hutchison) and Markee Sullivan Arts and Design (Schery Markee Sullivan); bottom row left, Jimmy Pickles Designs (Cherie Prisco) and right, Middle Country Public Library librarians Marlene Feehan and Sara Fade, Leslieanne Beller, Cherie Prisco, Schery Markee Sullivan and Farrah LaRonde-Hutchison.