



ELEVEN-YEAR-OLD TAKES FASHION DESIGNING TO ANOTHER LEVEL USING HER 'LITTLE MACHINE THAT COULD'



From young minds come great aspirations. Leah Howard discovered her passion for designing at the age of six years old when she decided she didn't like the dress that came on her Barbie doll and designed her own dress out of pink tissue paper.

"It was at that moment I saw Leah's creativity shine through," said her mother, Lori Davis-Howard. Lori explains how Leah started hand stitching at five years old when she was introduced to the craft at a quilt club. Leah became so enthralled with sewing that she even taught herself how to knit. Within one year, Lori decided it was

time to buy her daughter her first sewing machine. "I did some research on the best beginning sewing machines, and the **Brother** BB370 was the one for us," Lori said. "I love my Brother machine," Leah said excitedly. "We call it 'the little machine that could'!" One of the first things Leah sewed was a nightgown made from torn Laura Ashley sheets. She then went on to sew mix and match outfits for her dolls – and that is when Lori knew Leah had a talent that needed to be nurtured.

"It was obvious at that point that Leah had an innate gift for fashion designing, but I realized she needed to learn technique," Lori explained. She enrolled Leah in a local sewing school where her teacher, Margaret Garland, became her mentor and biggest fan. "I fell in love with the sewing school," Leah said. "I learned how to use patterns, which excited me even more to design new things."

Leah proclaims she is the biggest fan of the hit reality sewing show, *Project Runway*, and said it has been her inspiration to be a fashion designer. Brother International Corporation has been the exclusive sewing machine company of this popular fashion reality television show, since 2007. "I watch all of the shows and sew along with the challenges," Leah said. "My mom even bought me a shirt that says, 'Destination *Project Runway Junior* 2018'."

Today, at 11 years old, Leah has already designed collections for four fashion shows, the most recent one being for Baltimore Fashion Week this past August. Leah said her first three shows at smaller events were a great experience, but she was determined to be a part of the "Emerging Designers" category of Baltimore Fashion Week. "I submitted the sketches of my designs to the producers of the show," Leah explained. "I never in my wildest dreams thought they would want me to show in the main showcase," she said excitedly. Her 12-piece collection was titled, 'The Young Executive Woman,' which ranged from casual to evening wear designed in a variety of patterns, prints and colors. "I named my collection 'The Young Executive Woman' because today's women are the superheroes of my generation," Leah said. "They are taking over the world." It was important to Leah that she design a line that wasn't too revealing. "You don't have to show everything



to be beautiful," said Leah. "My line is modest and fashionable."

One of the highlights of this collection was a gown that Leah designed for Sunshine, a physically challenged model who is confined to a wheelchair. "This was my first time designing a piece of adaptive clothing," Leah said. "It was the best challenge I ever had." Leah and Lori worked together to find the perfect stretch material to construct the gown. "There's a lot that goes into designing for someone who has to sit for long periods of time and doesn't have the ability to move like we can," Leah explained. She decided to make the skirt portion of the gown open all the way around the garment to make it easier for Sunshine to get in and out of the gown. She also used a long coat zipper that started from the knee instead of from the back to make the opening and closing of it more convenient. The beauty of the gown was the way it covered the wheelchair to show off the design while also concealing the wheels of the chair. "I was able to design the perfect gown for Sunshine by working around her challenge and making her feel beautiful and confident," Leah said proudly.

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- Leah Davis Howard





Designing the gown for Sunshine inspired Leah to begin designing an adaptive clothing line for the upcoming New York Fashion Week in February 2017. Adaptive clothing is a unique design that transforms everyday clothing into styles that can be easily worn by individuals with specific physical disabilities or diminished motor skills. Her new collection will focus half on adaptive clothing and the other half on ready-to-wear. Leah explained how the fabric choice is critical for making the clothing not only fit properly, but feel comfortable for someone who is sitting all day. "It's important that the material doesn't bunch up when they sit," said Leah. "I have to pay close attention to the seams since that can become painful for someone who can't move or adjust easily." Using magnetic zippers and positioning closures in the front or sides is another factor when designing for amputees, for example. "We take getting dressed for granted," Leah said. "I want to make it easy for someone who lost an arm or leg to feel they can do it themselves and still look great."

The Wounded Warrior Project is working with Lori and Leah to scout female veterans to model her collection at New York Fashion Week. "Using women who are amputees makes it real," Leah said. Veterans, like her brother Charles, who has served four tours in Iraq, are close to Leah's heart. She said it's important to recognize their courage and bravery, no matter what happened to them.



Leah will be launching her own adaptive clothing line, Adaptive Style, on her website, leahfaithdesigns.com in the spring of 2017. Lori said that homeschooling Leah allowed her daughter to have the time to complete her studies while still giving her the time she needed to design her collections.

"I couldn't have done it without my Brother sewing machine," Leah said. Although she has outgrown her 'little machine that could,' Leah said it will always be her favorite machine. Lori is in the process of upgrading her daughter to a new Brother machine to keep up with her designing. "Brother was there for us from the start," Lori said. "We couldn't have asked for a better partner to make it all happen."

Brother continues to support beginner and advanced sewing and embroidery enthusiasts by building a range of durable, affordable and user-friendly machines with advanced features. Our new 2017 lineup includes the powerful and efficient Entrepreneur Pro X PR1050X 10-needle embroidery machine, and THE Dream Machine 2, our top-of-the-line combination machine with advanced design and editing capabilities. Keeping quality and affordability in mind, Brother also developed the Affordable Professional Line. Starting as low as \$599, this lineup features the Innov-is NQ550PRW sewing machine, Innov-is NS2750D combination sewing & embroidery machine, Innov-is NS1150E embroidery-only machine and the Simplicity® Limited Edition SB3734T serger. To learn more about Brother machines and where to buy, visit www.BrotherSews.com.

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