

WEEK OF AUG. 27-SEPT. 3, 2015

A GUIDE TO THE LOCAL ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT SCENE

What a DOLL

Doll maker inspired by influential, sometimes overlooked women in history

BY LINDSEY NESMITH

lnesmith@floridaweekly.com

WALK INTO ANY TOY SECTION IN A big-box store and you will see a proliferation of pink, overly mature and unrealistically molded dolls available for young girls to take home. For almost a generation now, mothers, grandmothers, aunts and beloved female role models have wrestled with the dilemma of whether to purchase these toys for the young girls in their lives.

Now a local seamstress is inserting herself into the problem by creating a line of huggable, un-pink dolls modeled after accomplished women in history.

Rosa Leon Riley, a Naples mental health counselor and owner of the craft website Twirling Tiny Sticks, recently launched her line of "Joan and Her Rad Friends" dolls. Only available on her

SEE DOLL, C4 ►



Rosa Leon Riley with dolls Joan of Arc, Harriet Tubman and Loretta Perfectus Walsh

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INSIDE



Nailed it

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Four plays announced for New Works Festival

SPECIAL TO FLORIDA WEEKLY

Four plays have been chosen for Gulfshore Playhouse's third annual New Works Festival, which will bring playwrights, actors and directors from across the country to The Norris Center Sept.

24-27.

Each of the works is assigned a director and actors who work together for 14.5 hours before performing a public staged reading.

The New Works Festival allows playwrights to transition from writing in a

solitary environment to adding actors and ultimately an audience to help them understand how their plays work in performance. Audience feedback is a vital part of the process.

"I am passionate about what I view

SEE PLAYS, C16 ►

DOLL

From page 1

website, the line features depictions of medieval military phenom Joan of Arc, freedom fighter Harriet Tubman and Naval yeomanette Loretta Perfectus Walsh.

A friend planted the idea with Ms. Riley via an offhanded comment during a museum visit.

“She said, ‘When I have kids, they’re only going to play with dolls that are educational figures,’” the doll maker recalls. “The conversation didn’t go any further than that, but I kept it in my mind and thought it was a good concept.”

Ms. Riley picked up sewing and crafting when she was 28 years old and her seamstress mother gifted her with a sewing machine. Since then, and after a few overly ambitious projects, she has taught herself how to sew and launched Twirling Tiny Sticks over a year ago. She now has an Etsy shop and is a fixture at local farmers markets.

Her blog, also names Twirling Tiny Sticks, is another creative expression evolution as a seamstress and businesswoman. Through posts about things from finishing felt rosettes for a relative’s funeral to how to make dreams come true, followers can see that her sewing aspirations are a culmination of personality and drive. She admits in one caption, “I remember when zippers used to scare me,” after successfully executing an intimidating recessed zipper for a purse project.

In her first post in February 2014, she writes:

“In recent years, I’ve contemplated creating blogs about things like mac

and cheese (yes, I love it) or foot woes (yes, I’ve had multiple surgeries and constant issues with one of my feet), but very easily the time escaped me! When I revisited the idea, I could not think of anything better than starting a blog about my favorite hobby — making things! Some days it’s sewing and others it’s leaving trails of hot glue and sequins all over our kitchen table, which doubles as my official craft office. On other days, I’m attending a class, making something for our home, or struggling with tangled yarn.

“For me, sewing has been something that brings so much pleasure and fun and creativity ...”

The bulk of her business consists of selling items such as crossbody bags, bibs, cocktail napkins and other small household and personal items she makes. Launching Twirling Tiny Sticks has been a learning process, she says, and she hopes to one day turn it into a full-time occupation.

“It’s within the last year-and-a-half that I’ve been doing it, but it has never been as serious as it is now. When I started my blog, I really wanted to do this as more than just a hobby,” she says. “I’m going full force to have a crafting business.”

She started working in earnest on “Joan and her Rad Friends” last March. She had no experience at all creating



VANDY MAJOR / FLORIDA WEEKLY

Rosa Leon Riley, shown here in her workshop, is also a mental health counselor and enjoys that her line of dolls, “Joan and Her Rad Friends,” blends her interests in women’s advocacy and sewing. “Once you’re an advocate, you can never leave that behind,” she says.

them and had to work out every details: construction, prototypes and, of course, subjects.

“Ideas are only so much. I thought I needed action,” she says. “Beliefs can be

limiting and I thought I just needed to do something.”

One detail she wasn’t anticipating was running into rights of publicity, meaning that some figures have entities controlling their name and likeness. Therefore, her dolls are modeled after women who are not living today. The whole point of the line, she adds, is to also recognize overlooked and influential women, which is how Loretta Perfectus Walsh got added to the line-up.

“I want people to know about women no one really knows,” she said. “I wanted to include people who didn’t get credit for what they did at the time.”

For now, she intends to create the dolls as she receives orders from her website. Included with each order is just enough information about the subject to pique girls’ interest.

“My hope is that parents and caregivers will spend time with their children learning more about ‘Joan and her Rad Friends’ and that these dolls will help them to not only dream big, but work to make those dreams come true.”

Each doll is \$47.99. A portion of each sale from the first 100 dolls will be donated to Girls on the Run of Collier County. Ms. Riley also creates custom dolls for \$57.99 each.

For more information, visit twirlingtinysticks.com. ■

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