

Step in her shoes

By Laura Brown

Josie Puskar sews dance clothes all day and says she would not trade her factory job for any other.

At 8:15 a.m., and Josie Puskar stumbles to her car outside her boyfriend's apartment. Her dark brown hair, which matches her brown glasses, is loosely pinned up by four bobby pins. She's wearing a gray sweatshirt, cut-off blue sweat pants, and bright green flip flops. Her oversized leather black purse from Urban Outfitters is slung over her shoulder, open, and ready to spill out makeup, random papers, and the ever jingling pill bottle, making it sound like Christmas morning in September.

After a quick check in her rear view mirror, she quickly applies some lip gloss and speeds off on her way to Step in Time, a dance clothes manufacturer where she has worked as a cutter/sewer for the past three years. Being only 22 years- old, she admits that working in a factory setting is unusual.

"I've always loved to sew and make things, so people don't seem surprised when I tell them where I work and what I do. I used to sew all the time, but now I mainly cut fabric."

Working at what she calls the "small table," she uses an electric rotary cutter that can cut up 12 layers of fabric at once, or six pairs of pants. With the buzzing of the rotary and the constant humming from the dozen sewing machines in the room adjacent to where she cuts, the term "busy bees" seems almost too appropriate. When asked about any protective gear she should be wearing while using the machinery, she smiles as though she's about to divulge a secret.

"Well, we have it available. We call it the 'jacko glove.' It's a thumbless glove made out of metal mesh, and it has a leather strap which wraps around your wrist. The only problem is that I have midge hands. Even an extra small adult glove is still huge on my tiny nubs. So, it's even more dangerous to wear it cause it kinda flops around," she says as she flails her hand around to demonstrate her point. "It's nearly impossible to cut yourself on the rotary though--only one girl did and that's because she was talking on her cell phone, not even looking down at it."

Despite the inherent dangers of working with the machinery and some minor frustrations from her co-workers, Josie is adamant that there is not just one thing she loves about her job. During the summer she is able to work full-time, but when she is in school she says it's about 15 hours a week, or whenever they can fit her in. From the uniform, or lack thereof, and the hours at Step in Time, she feels she picked the perfect part-time job that complements her school schedule.

“I don't have to work past 4 p.m., ever. I don't have to work on the weekends – obviously that's awesome. We get off every holiday, even the little ones, because my boss wants to have a party so why would she even open the store. I love the fact that I just basically wake up in my clothes and go there, it doesn't matter what you look like, you don't have to deal with customers and I can pretty much leave whenever I need to- it's very laid-back.”

There are, however, a few downsides to working at Step in Time and being immersed in dance clothes all day. Josie calls her work place a “hell hole” and says that it is ridiculously unorganized. Even though she has had the opportunity to design her own line of dance clothes that was published the Step in Time fall catalog, she can't wait to break out and do her own thing.

“I have so many ideas and no one will listen to me, even though I'm a semester away from having a degree in this business. I mean after three whole years and a lot of begging and pleading and threatening to quit, I finally make \$7 an hour. How sad is that?”

Josie has been known to make jean skirts out of a pair of old jeans, purses out of towels or scraps of fabric, and even a life-sized Bill Cosby doll, which is definitely a conversation piece. She also loves to hone her designing skills every year when it comes to creating unique Halloween costumes. Last year, she combined a variety of thrift store finds to make her Peg Bundy costume, and this year she will be Katie Holmes, complete with baby Suri, which means her boyfriend, Brett, will most likely have no choice but to be Tom Cruise.

“I have always been creative and even though I never really put it in perspective, I'm sure Step in Time has helped me in my creative endeavors. If anything, it looks great on a resume especially since I was able to complete an internship there.”

After graduating from YSU in spring 2007 with a degree in fashion merchandising, Josie plans on attending Virginia Marti College of Art and Design in Cleveland.

“Eventually I want to be a designer, and I'd love to have my own boutique someday. My motto has always been, ‘why buy that shirt when I can make it?’ I want to be a superstar.”