

The Washington Times

www.washingtontimes.com

Frump fighter

By Jen Haberkorn

THE WASHINGTON TIMES

Published February 23, 2007

Margaret Lilly is sitting on the floor of a gigantic closet, tossing old sweaters into a trash pile, replacing wire hangers with wooden ones and putting outfits together.

Next, she'll take Polaroids of all the shoes and tape them to the outside of their storage box. Then, she'll make lists of the best outfits and note the items of clothing needed to fill in the wardrobe.

Ms. Lilly, 28, fashion adviser and personal shopper, is taking the frumpy out of Danielle Omar's wardrobe.

She'll spend the day deconstructing the wardrobe of the 36-year-old dietitian, whose outfits do not measure up now that she has given up her job at a gym to take on a teaching position.

Ms. Lilly shows Mrs. Omar how to wear fashionable but confusing items, such as Ugg boots, shrugs, layers and high-waisted belts -- though not at the same time.

She makes her throw out dated shirts and sweaters with worn fabric, insisting she replace them with better colors and better fits.

"This is a painful experience," Mrs. Omar says jokingly. "Most of this stuff I know, I just need somebody else to tell me."

For the ordinary person, the closet is just a closet. The clothes are just clothes. But for Ms. Lilly, redoing this closet is one step toward reviving a sense of fashion in a famously unfashionable town.

"The environment is focused so much on politics -- we're the capital; it's a serious place. I think people get carried away and wrapped up in the part that they think if you're creative with your wardrobe, you won't be taken as seriously. I'm here to change that," she says confidently.

Ms. Lilly takes a blunt but friendly approach to telling clients when an outfit just doesn't work. It's a skill she cultivated while dealing with her six sisters.

She loved shopping for them and doling out fashion advice in their Silver Spring home. She later landed her first job at South Moon Under, an Ocean City-based chain of boutiques. After obtaining a degree in clothing and textiles from Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Ms. Lilly held jobs at Nordstrom, Banana Republic and

Advertisement



Brooks Brothers.

Ms. Lilly says she's always been interested in fashion.

"My family hates me for it," she says jokingly. "I always am coordinated, to an extent."

In April, she finally followed the advice of family and friends and founded Lilly's Closet.

"So far the business is not as steady as I'd like it to be," she says, closing in on just one year. "It's definitely a full-time job, but I don't have clients all day."

Her typical client ranges from young professionals to late 30-somethings, with the occasional 50-something looking to renew her image.

Ms. Lilly says she works with each client's individual style, whether classic, preppy, urban or sporty.

"I like different looks for myself," she says. "I've had people say 'I can't do that' but by the end of [the session] they'll give it more of a chance."

When she's not meeting with clients, she's doing their personal shopping, finding new stores and doing the administrative work of owning a business.

Closet-organizing sessions are \$350 for up to three hours and personal shopping is \$65 per hour. Other packages run from \$150 for a basic editing of a closet's contents and a list of what pieces are missing to \$1,400 to retain Ms. Lilly as a personal stylist for a year.

Mrs. Omar, who did her first closet session with Ms. Lilly about a year ago, says she feels more put-together and doesn't buy the first thing she likes in a store anymore.

"I don't buy as much as I normally would," she says. "I don't make as many impulse purchases because I know it isn't a good fit."

Copyright © 2007 News World Communications, Inc. All rights reserved.

Return to the article



[Want to use this article? Click here for options!](#)

Copyright The Washington Times