

Student weaves pattern for her future

BY MICHELLE ARNTZ
Special to the Record-Eagle

Nineteen-year-old Elizabeth Koeppen is a daughter who would make any parent proud. A college student, accomplished artist and savvy business owner, the Traverse City resident has no time for television.

"But I do enjoy old movies, particularly musicals and westerns," Koeppen said.

Even when she is watching a movie, her hands are busy knitting, dyeing, spinning or weaving her handmade yarn.

"I taught myself how to knit continental-style," Koeppen said, who is often asked to teach the European technique. often gives away the beautiful scarves, hats and sweaters that she creates.

While still in junior high school, Koeppen started her own business, Up North Crafts. Being too young to apply for a Doing Business As (DBA) license herself, her father, Pete Koeppen, helped her out while she learned the fine art of running a business.

"He has always been there for me and just made things happen," Koeppen said.

She added that he has always encouraged her to "try out" all of her artistic interests and has helped her realize her obtainable dreams.

"He drove me to all the crafts shows around here and as far away as East Jordan. He would sit at the booth all day," Koeppen

said, adding that he helped her acquire the pottery and jewelry kilns needed to make her homemade wares.

She admits that while she probably broke even financially, the experience and informal education that she gained by operating her first business is priceless.

During her junior year of high school at TC West, Elizabeth began to pursue a formal business education at Northwestern Michigan College, participating in the Dual Enrollment Program. At 19 years old, she is not going "back to school." Going year round, Koeppen has technically accumulated enough credits to declare an associates degree. Barely one year out of high school, she has completed enough courses to be considered a college junior.

Enrolled as a student at both NMC and Ferris State University, she is currently working towards a bachelor's degree in accounting.

"I got hooked on accounting after taking Mr. Martin's Accounting Class at TC West," Koeppen said. She said that her friends are surprised that she is not going off to school to major in art.

"I love it here. It's beautiful and I want to stay here the rest of my life," said Koeppen, who hopes to be able to use her business background to successfully run her own specialty shop of eclectic gifts.

Using the 18-page mock business plan that she wrote while a student in

NMC's Entrepreneurship Class taught by Business Professor, Dr. Kelly Bruning, Koeppen launched her new business, The Dahlia Collection.

"The Entrepreneurship class is offered every spring semester at NMC. It give students the opportunity to develop a business plan which includes strategy, goals setting, financial projections and an abbreviated marketing plan at the end, students create a comprehensive business plan that they can use to get their business off the ground or use in a portfolio for perspective employers," Bruning said.

Now old enough to apply for a DBA, The Dahlia Collection is beginning to blossom. Busy making "classy, beautiful yet affordable items," she is already selling her hand-dyed yarns at the Farmer's Markets in Glen Arbor and Leland, at Inish Knits in Cedar and her jewelry at Watermelon Sugar in Traverse City.

When asked what her inspiration was in choosing the business's name, Koeppen said, "Because I love flowers and dahlias are so beautiful." And she has to stay focused to keep up.

"The owner of Art of Knitting in Linden bought every thing I had," Koeppen said, who just walked into the shop with

her yarn one day.

This past July, Elizabeth and friend Jill MacLellan, had to work fast and furiously so that they could take over 100 hand-dyed skeins between them to the Fiber Festival, held at Castle Farms in Charlevoix.

Her father's living room is home to a spinning wheel and triangular loam. Brightly-colored yarns lay around on the sofa, offering proof of the activities going on at home while Pete is at work. Here, Elizabeth's talent for dyeing virgin wool into beautiful, high-dimension color combinations is obvious.

With the initial expenses of operating a business, one might wonder how Koeppen affords to go to college year-round. Cutting back during the summer, she took 10 credit hours while working two jobs.

"I work for Fiona McPherson Grant, owner of Inish Knits, and at Blue Moon Ice Cream, both in Cedar," Koeppen said.

She also applies for and has received many scholarships. While in high school, Koeppen was awarded scholarships from Huntington Bank and the Michigan Education Assistance Program. She also won the prestigious Glen Anderson Scholarship.

Using TC West Career Center before high school graduation, Koeppen



Photo/Michelle Arntz

Elizabeth Koeppen working at her craft. The Traverse City college student has parlayed her knitting, spinning, weaving skills into a successful business venture.

learned that there is money out there for students who want to continue their education after high school.

"People should really search for scholarship

because they are out there," Koeppen said.

Michelle Arntz is a local freelance writer.

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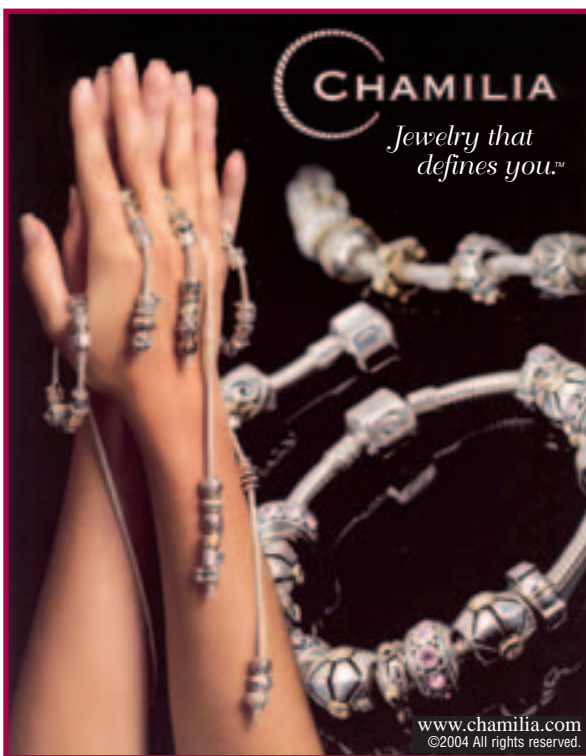
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