



DESIGNER MILLINERY

311 4TH AVE
SUITE 417

Hat Maker Helps Others



MERCHANT P R O F I L E

Article by Stephen Silke

Diana Cavagnaro, owner and operator of Designer Millinery, located at 311 Fourth Avenue Suite 417, has been in the hat business for 20 years. Her creativity and interests are as diverse as her line of hats and is displayed in her designs and leadership in the community. The variety of her product styles are impressive, from the more formal and classic designs made for Designer Millinery, to her Softops brand 100% cotton Goldenrod Collection. She also sells a selection of cotton/lycra blends in the Rose collection, and makes the Gardenia style from hemp. The Softops hats are all very functional and can be folded up and stored without any loss of shape.

Softops.org is her web site selling hats "designed for the ultimate in comfort and natural breathability." The site also sells scarves, nightcaps, and flower hairpins of all varieties. Cavagnaro's other website: Aheadproductions.com sells many types of fashion hats, cord hats, tie hats, and wooden block molds for hand making hats, all from the Designer Millinery Collection.

Diana has taught millinery at San Diego Mesa College for the past 12 years, and in her spare time she paints and plays the flute (she is classically trained in the latter and has a degree in music). She brings this commitment of excellence to her art as her hats are all hand made and unique from what one would find at Nordstrom or Nieman Marcus.

With all of her pursuits she still finds time to work as a volunteer with cancer patients in the Look Good Feel Better Program sponsored by the American Cancer Society. This program shows cancer patients how to wear hats. Over 650 hats are made and given away annually. Diana says that for cancer patients, receiving hats "puts smiles on their faces."

She is also the Founder of the Annual Easter Bonnet Parade and Hat Contest. This event takes place in the Gaslamp Quarter and proceeds benefit Pediatric Hematology/ Oncology at UCSD Hospital in San Diego. Diana spends 4 months a year working with 50 volunteers to produce the Easter Bonnet Parade which introduces children to making their own wearable art. The event features an Easter egg hunt, face painting, and a silent auction.

With so many requests for instruction on hat making she decided to start a series of "how to" hat making videos. Her first video entitled "Straw Hat Class" has been released and was produced and filmed by George Bates a Gaslamp Quarter Association Board Member. The video is 60 minutes in length. There are several more videos in the works to supplement Diana's six hat making courses. The courses include raffia hats, felt hats, bridal and cocktail hats, flat patterning design, and a course on molding hats by steam.

Diana finds similarities between her work loft in the Pioneer Warehouse and what is being done in the lofts of the New York fashion industry. She loves the Gaslamp Quarter because it is centrally located and has its own personality. She also likes its friendly, small town atmosphere that makes it less like a mall and more like a community. Her hats sell over the Internet at www.softops.org and www.aheadproductions.com. For more information about hat making, to set up a personal visit to her studio, or schedule a hat making class call (619) 239-4287.