



The Sewing Labs

Create. Inspire. Thrive.



The Sewing Labs
526 Campbell,
Kansas City, MO 64106

www.TheSewingLabs.community



2021

Annual Report

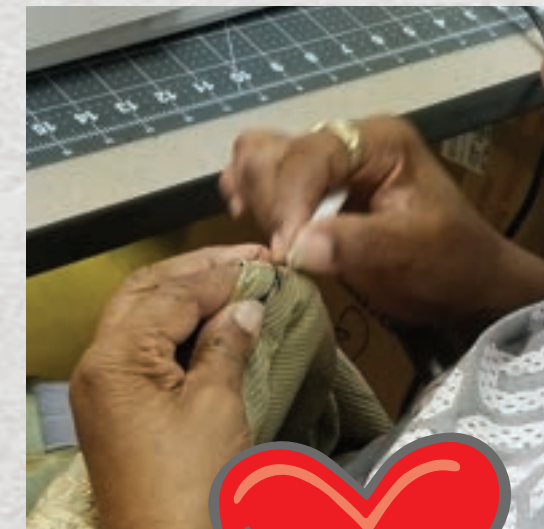


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Message from the Executive Director

Every individual deserves the opportunity to achieve financial dignity. Here at *The Sewing Labs*, we understand how to help create viable paths toward that dignity through the legacy, vocation, and trade that is sewing. By teaching the core fundamentals of sewing, we are preparing a pipeline of stitchers for our greater Kansas City community. Throughout 2021, we were flooded with employers and entrepreneurs who sought to hire trained stitchers to fill their hiring needs.



A Workforce Development Program

To help meet the needs of businesses hiring stitchers, in 2021 we officially partnered with both the Missouri and United States Departments of Labor as a Registered Apprentice Sponsor and also to serve as a Related Training Institute for Industrial Sewing Machine Operator training. This is offered as part of our Sewing Salon Training Program, which results in an apprenticeship as part of course completion. This apprenticeship program adds validity and increases the employment value of the clients in our workforce development program.

Emotional Dignity

The Sewing Labs experiences firsthand the tremendous health and wellness benefits that our clients gain through sewing. Every day, we see the remarkable boost to self-confidence and the sense of accomplishment that this skill brings. Sewing boosts mental health by acting as a relief valve from the pressures that surround us in our world today, especially for those who find themselves in an at-risk situation. Focusing on one thing, such as sewing, can calm the mind, reduce stress and anxiety, and lower blood pressure and heart rate. This singular focus puts us into creative “flow,” which some say is the key to happiness.

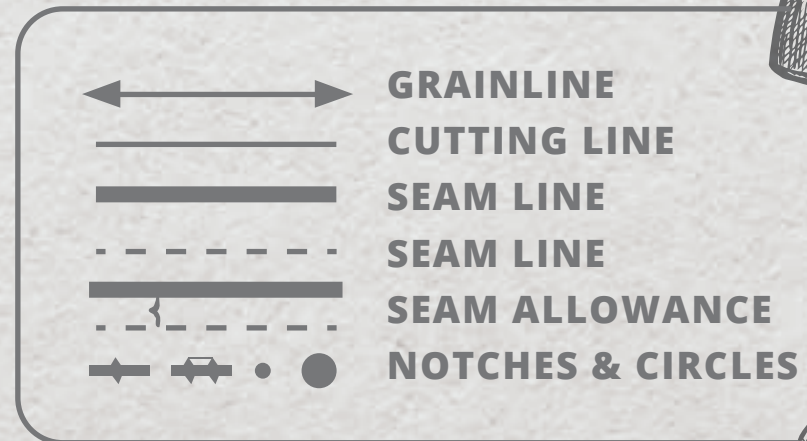
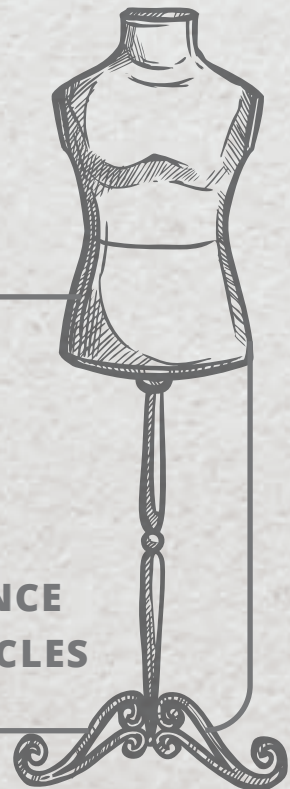
Green Initiatives

Since our inception, repurposing, re-use, recycling, and upcycling have been a foundation for all that we do. It is through sewing that we support and elevate sustainability. Every day we are repurposing material, machines, and notions. Additionally, *The Sewing Labs* maintains the mindset that learning mending and repair add tremendous value to our world. Thank you for supporting *The Sewing Labs*, where we are transforming lives for the better, one stitch at a time.

In kindness,

Eileen Bobowski

Executive Director
The Sewing Labs
526 Campbell
Kansas City, MO 64106





Who We Are

Mission Statement

The Sewing Labs is an inclusive and welcoming community teaching the legacy of sewing for employment, entrepreneurship, and enrichment.

Updated 2020

Vision

The Sewing Labs focuses on individuals who find themselves in at-risk situations such as generational poverty, substance abuse and recovery, immigrants, refugees, the formerly incarcerated, and veterans through job skills training, creative sewing arts, and networking. We welcome everyone.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Statement

The Sewing Labs is an inclusive and welcoming community. We support and celebrate diversity throughout all our programs. We foster connections and a stronger understanding through shared experiences.

We believe there is strength in the differences among individuals and what they bring to our community.

By uplifting a culture of diversity and individualism we encourage the inclusion of everyone, no matter their age, gender, ethnicity, race, ability, religion, sexual orientation, or any other identity that makes each person unique.



Workforce Program

Our programming teaches sewing skills as a pathway toward financial and emotional dignity through acquiring employment and/or entrepreneurship in the Kansas City marketplace. Participants engage in a safe and nurturing community that supports them while they gain self-confidence, problem-solving skills, and an independent voice. The curriculum expands their skills, knowledge, and creative thinking, which in turn, expands their world of possibilities.

The Sewing Salon Training Program (SSTP) teaches the vocational skills of sewing on domestic and industrial machines and includes basic small business entrepreneurial classes. SSTP is a Registered Apprenticeship Program with the Missouri and United States Departments of Labor. As the Related Training Institution (RTI), we teach Industrial Sewing Machine Operations and then partner with local employers as the On The Job (OTJ) Apprenticeship host.

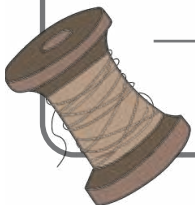
The participants of this program are recruited primarily from agencies throughout Kansas City and surrounding areas who serve at-risk and underserved populations. Through these partnerships, we join together to align the individual's desire to become an Industrial Sewing Machine Operator with employment. Funding for these individuals is supported through gifts and scholarships as well as outside sources. This program also accepts self-funded individuals who wish to pursue a career in industrial sewing.

The SSTP curriculum consists of

240+ classroom hours

completed over approximately

30 weeks



Classes are taught by experienced industry professionals who are active in the marketplace. This vocational training teaches operator skills on a variety of machines and industrial production systems and methods to develop a well-rounded knowledge of the industrial sewing marketplace.

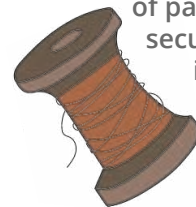


This is the knowledge that will foster economic self-sufficiency through job placement and/or entrepreneurship. The apprenticeship consists of paid on-the-job learning with local, vetted, registered employers.

The entrepreneurial portions are based on the FDIC Smart Money for Small Business program and are led and taught by local business professionals, each with deep knowledge of the business aspect they teach—including local entrepreneurs as guest speakers.

Overall, the SSTP core training program takeplace over an average of 12 months. Once the student graduates from the training portion, they move to the apprenticeship or on-the-job training to achieve an Apprenticeship Certification from the United States Department of Labor. This requires that they put in 2,000 hours on the job toward the Industrial Sewing Machine Operator endorsement. These individuals are provided access to mentors as they transition into the workplace. In addition, they then have access to the network of sewing jobs and employers available through our programs.

In addition to technical training, we address many issues identified as obstacles with at-risk or underserved individuals. While participating in the program, students build their own network from cohorts, instructors, volunteers, and employers who will support them afterwards. They are challenged to be self-reliant and motivated, which increases their employability and job satisfaction. As part of the training, they attend site tours; a variety of live workrooms and industries exposes them to the vast array of jobs in industrial sewing. They will enter the workforce with elevated skills, which translates into a higher entrance rate of pay and stronger job sustainability. Our staff help them secure a job before they graduate. All these factors result in an increase in self-esteem and better coping skills, and they are proud and empowered to reach their full potential.





Employer Connections

The Sewing Labs is uniquely positioned in Kansas City with employers who are actively seeking trained Industrial Sewing Machine Operators. We receive multiple requests for trained operators weekly. The need is high! We vet companies to better understand their needs and to determine whether their company culture is a good match with our mission. Industrial Operators are used in many industries, including but not limited to product manufacturing, boat, auto, aviation or home upholstery, decor fabrication (including drapery and bedding for home and hotels), medical garments and accessories, advertising banners and flags, mattress construction, fashion goods such as clothing and accessories, alterations and mending, custom bridal, tailoring, and more. Opportunities to work full time or part time are readily available as both an employee and entrepreneur. Home-based operators are a welcomed workforce and support the needs of the individual. All these skills are transferable into vast industries and are skills that remain with the individual. Information technologies are also strong within the industry with programmable machines and CAD systems in quilting and embroidery machines. We introduce our sewists to all these elements.



Community Program

At *The Sewing Labs*, we believe that “Sewing is a universal language.” Toward that end, we offer a wide variety of classes and workshops in sewing, quilting and fiber arts. These classes are available to our entire community of underserved together with the community at large.

Along with the material presented, the purpose of these classes is to make connections and friendships in this space that positively impacts each person and the whole community. These positive influences spread and grow into all aspects of the participants’ lives. Mental and physical health benefits include a sense of trust and belonging, love of life and learning, reported higher energy, and patience. In our community, we bring together persons from different “life-cloths” with the sewing machine as an equalizer. Our program strives to gather individuals from diverse backgrounds, ethnicities, and ages to raise each other up.

“A community is a mental and spiritual condition of knowing that the place is shared, and that the people who share the place define and limit the possibilities of each other’s lives. It is the knowledge that people have of each other. Their concern for each other, their trust in each other, the freedom with which they come and go among themselves.”

—Wendell Berry

“Art therapy works through integrative methods by engaging the mind, body, and spirit in ways that are distinct from verbal articulation alone. Art therapy and the sewing process at *The Sewing Labs* has provided kinesthetic, sensory, perceptual, and symbolic opportunities for students and participants to explore alternative modes of receptive and expressive communication.”

—Robert Lackie

Sewing has historically been an avenue of mutual support within a community. Individuals give of their time and talent to stitch together items that are useful, needed, and beautiful. We host Community Outreach Projects that engage both at-home and in-house volunteer sewists. Projects range from face masks; community totes for Volunteer KC; pillowcases for seniors; and fleece hats and scarves for the homeless. Our community projects grew out of the abundance of in-kind fabric donations that we receive from individuals. These projects allow our mission’s voice to be spread farther.



Additionally, the Kansas City sewing community itself has been key in the success of *The Sewing Labs*. Ninety percent of all materials and supplies come from in-kind donations from local sewists. From fabrics to notions and tools to sewing machines, these gifts show how our community believes in the value of sewing. This community is also the primary source of our volunteers. Their experience and knowledge add to our overall success. As a way to give back to this community of stitchers, we open our doors to all on Open Sew Fridays. This is FREE sewing with access to the tools, equipment, and stash to those who participate. In addition, we host a soft fundraiser bi-annually we call the Fabric Grab. Again, this is our opportunity to connect with our supporters face-to-face as well as their opportunity for FREE and bargain fabrics.

“The future of every community lies in capturing the passion, imagination, and resources of its people.”

—Robert Lackie



Community Relationships/ Outreach Projects

Sweet Dreams for Seniors

In 2021, **775**

pillowcases were crafted & delivered to low income senior centers.



260
tote bags

were created for the homeless in partnership with **Volunteer KC**



325
fleece hats & scarves were assembled for the underserved

10,828

masks were sewn and distributed to the community.



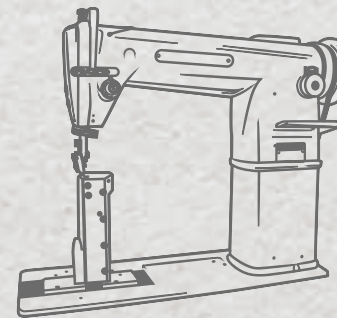
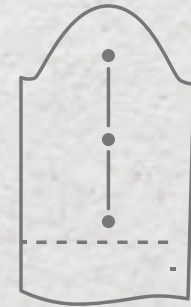
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In 2021, we received

5,355

pounds of fabric, notions, patterns, and sewing machines as in-kind donations.

In-kind donations are put to work in our programs by allowing our clients to tap into these materials at no charge.



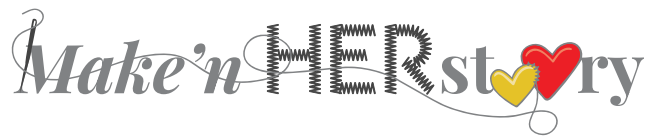
We work to re-gift donated sewing machines to our clients so that they can continue to hone their craft from home.

This also allows our clients the ability to more fully invest in the thousand hours required to truly master a skill.

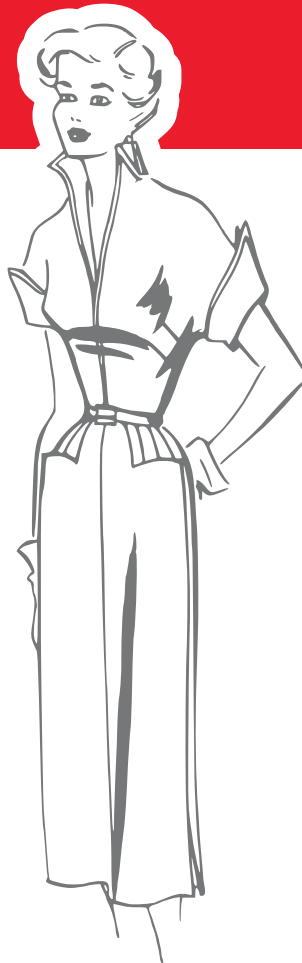




Inaugural Make'n HERstory Fundraiser



In May of 2021, we hosted our inaugural signature fundraising event: Make'n HERstory, featuring Tamara Day as our initial keynote speaker who inspired donors with her story of making her life and living through her creative muse. The second day featured speakers Thalia Cherry, Katie Mabry van Dieren, and Kilee Nickels, who also motivated listeners with their passion and variety of approaches to be an entrepreneur. In addition to the speakers, several fiber artists showcased their talent in breakout sessions. A Strawberry Swing Indie Craft Fair presented time to walk, shop, and visit with the artists, with proceeds supporting our programs.



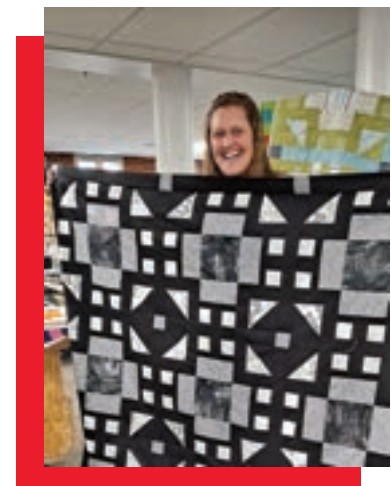
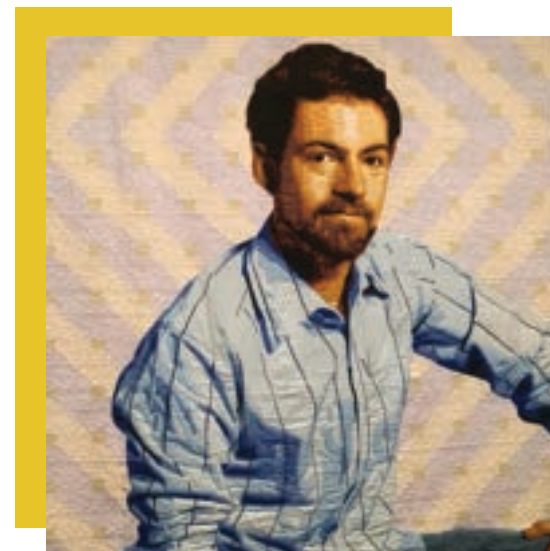
6th Annual Gratitude & Grace Quilt Retreat

The Gratitude and Grace Quilt retreat was started with two goals in mind.

1. Gather a group of stitchers together with sewing, food, and fellowship to craft friendships and share this unique providence of kindred sewing spirits.
2. Offer a retreat in quilting to those who might not otherwise experience a sewing retreat or who could not afford it.

“ If you cannot see it, you cannot dream it.
 —*Kelly Wilson*
 co-founder *The Sewing Labs* ”

Each year a quilt artist is featured in a trunk show during the retreat as a bonus to expand our imaginations in design. We were honored in 2021 to host quilter Luke Haynes, a fabric designer for *Moda*. Luke focuses on sustainable quilting, usually using bed sheets and clothing as his choice of cloth. His unique perspective and studies in self-portraiture and log cabin-patterned quilts was fascinating.

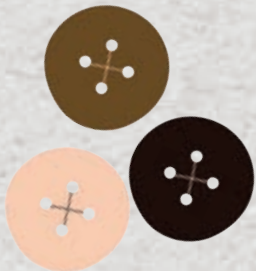


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Strategic Partnerships

We have strategic partnerships and collaborations with a variety of community organizations, including the following:

- Alterations Cut & Sew
- Blue Springs Twilight Stitchers Quilt Guild
- Clara Manor Nursing Home
- City Union Mission
- Climate Council of Greater Kansas City
- CommunityAmerica Credit Union
- Columbus Park Plaza
- Dr. Patricia Eisele
- Money Smart Alliance – FDIC
- Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education
- Missouri Job Center
- Fashion Tech Kansas City/ KC Sewing Company
- Fabri-Quilt, Inc./Paintbrush Studio/Warp & Phil
- Growing Days
- House of Pamela Renee'
- Kay-T's Kozey's & More LLC
- Kansas City Modern Quilt Guild
- Social Media Club of Kansas City
- Lee's Summit Quilter's Guild
- Literacy KC/Don Bosco Centers
- Myers Nursing Home and Center
- Missouri Sewing Machine Company
- Missouri Star Quilt Company
- MLK Sr. Community Resources Collaborative
- Newhouse
- Operation Breakthrough
- Rotary Club
- Summit Nursing Home
- The Strawberry Swing Indie Craft Fair/Shop Local KC
- The Grooming Project
- Volunteer KC, Inc.
- U.S. Department of Labor
- Missouri Department of Labor
- Polsinelli Law Firm
- Kelsey McLellan Huber
- Jim Fridell
- Weave Gotcha Covered!
- Wyandot Center
- Wyandot Behavioral Health Network
- WomenSpirit/ Sacred Stitches
- WhitneyManney Fashions



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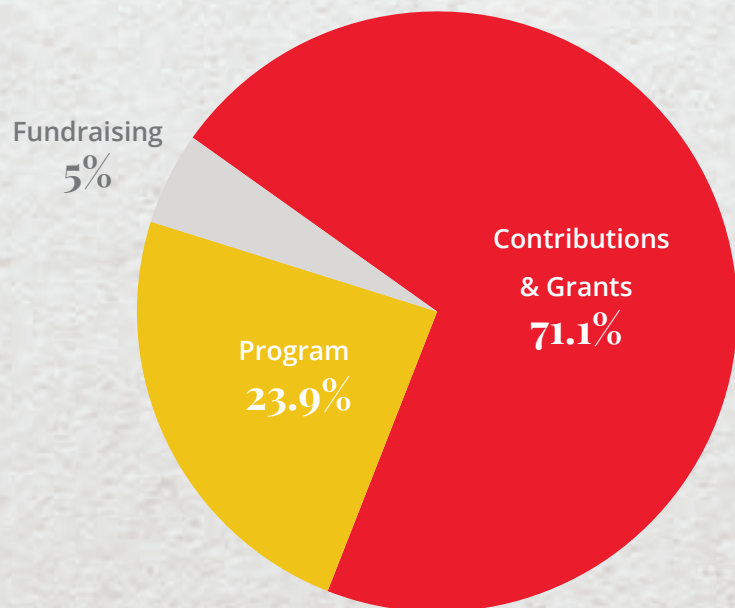
Key Supporters

- Amy Barickman
- Alli Lindemann
- Central Presbyterian Church
- Charlie Hustle
- Craft Industry Alliance
- Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation
- Joann Fabric and Crafts
- JE Dunn Family Foundation
- Kansas City Athenaeum
- Kris Smither
- KuSHH, LLC
- Do Good Co.
- Cassie Atteberry
- Indigo Wild
- Lauren Hughes, MD
- Denita Robinson
- Kate E. Burke
- Cinder Block Brewery
- Loon + Co
- Julie Hansen Fine Art Studio
- Olfa
- Patty Rooney
- Reverend Nhien Vuong
- Aubrey Vineyards
- Ann Greenleaf
- Go Ape Treetop Adventures
- Colonial Patterns, Inc.
- Janella Bee Studio
- Chicken N Pickle
- Pirtle Winery
- Loops, A Yarn Store
- Annette Hosmann
- Kriss Miller/Tiny Farm Studio
- Rachel Simpson
- Jan Stanley
- Kayla Fioravanti
- Kennedy's Custom Jewelers
- Greater Kansas City Community Foundation
- GreenEarth Cleaning
- Gia Wright
- Henry E. Wurst Family Foundation
- LaMar's Donuts and Coffee
- KC Sewing Company
- Art by .E Lewis
- Tasty Unicorn Shannon Fabrics
- DEMDACO
- Baby Lock
- Lead Bank
- Unity Arts Ministry
- Literacy KC/Don Bosco Center'
- Main Street Inn
- Randy & Jan Steinman
- Singer Sewing Machine Company
- Holy Rosary Credit Union
- Missouri Star Quilt Company
- Oliso, Inc.
- Lisa Gioia
- Hallmark
- Ann Handelman
- Powell Gardens
- LDH Scissors
- T-Shotz
- Karen Gibson
- Betsy Verulst
- Restless Spirits Distilling Company
- The Sunderland Foundation
- Union Horse Distillery
- Weave Gotcha Covered!
- Yarnspirations
- Individual Private Donors



2021 Financials (unaudited)

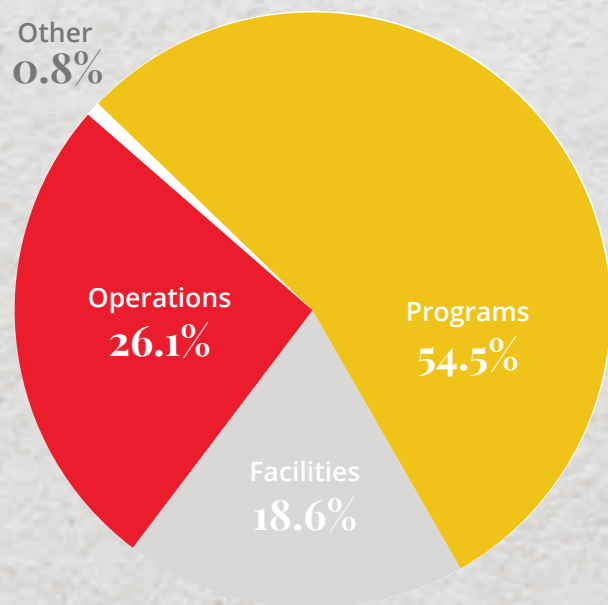
2021 Income



Tax Status

The Sewing Labs received 501(c)(3) status in May 2018.

2021 Expenses



Board of Directors

Cara Voss Seiler, *President*

Nancy Peterson, *Vice-President*

Barbara Hadley, *Treasurer*

Kris Smither, *Secretary*

Kelsey McLellan Huber

Derek Toms

Eileen Bobowski, *Executive Director*





Jennifer's Story

One day, on the way to vote, Jennifer Lorraine noticed an old red brick building across from Holy Rosary parish. For some time, it had been under construction or renovation. A tent was pitched in the parking lot, and a woman was distributing packets. "Something was telling me to walk up to this stranger to see what was going on. And during a pandemic!" Jennifer recalls. "But that voice was strong, so I did." That was how she met Ann Greenleaf and found *The Sewing Labs*.

From there, her journey took off.

Hers hadn't been an easy path. She'd moved to Kansas City five years before and struggled. Trained in dance and choreography, she searched for a new creative outlet but found herself repeatedly working part-time gigs as a barista, as a bartender. And in the midst of this hand-to-mouth existence came Covid. The pandemic eliminated even those low-level jobs.

"The pandemic forced me to slow down, to think. During lockdown, I started a garden in my backyard. I would walk all over my neighborhood; I carried my cat in a backpack, I walked around Columbus Park. Then I started trying to sell my stuff, listing anything I didn't need." Eventually, she began scavenging at thrift stores for what she could flip on eBay to pay her rent.

The day she walked up to Ann Greenleaf's tent and picked up a kit to sew face masks marked a sea change in her life. She dug out her old sewing machine, stitched up the masks, took them back. She got another kit to sew up—and also a class schedule. She signed up for Basic Sewing classes. "I lived a block away from *The Sewing Labs* and felt like it had been planted in front of me."



And if *The Sewing Labs* was planted in front of Jennifer, it was a garden that would yield a bountiful harvest. She finished Basic Sewing and signed up for the *Sewing Salon Training Program*. "I found that I was learning skills I wanted to learn years before." In her twenties, she'd started a Log Cabin quilt from a quilting book, cutting her own pants into long strips. "My lines were not straight because my cutting was so bad." She shakes her head at the memory. "It took me 12 years to finish that quilt."

If the Basic Sewing class escalated her enthusiasm, the SSTP skyrocketed it into the biggest creative shift of her life.

She was invited to attend the annual Gratitude and Grace Quilt Retreat. "At the retreat, I was the only person with less than a year of sewing. I was so nervous. Yet all the ladies were so generous and helpful. In one weekend I made a quilt top!" And then she was hooked.

She began to conduct a mentoring program for new quilters on the recently-acquired long-arm quilting machines and soon was regularly teaching and coaching others in operation and safety sessions.

A site visit to Fabri-Quilt, one of *The Sewing Labs'* business supporters, intrigued her even more, and when Fabri-Quilt reached out for a graduate of the *Sewing Salon Training Program*, Jennifer interviewed and was hired. Today she works full time in the sewing industry—her confidence and financial dignity at an all-time high.

Sewing was the creative outlet her spirit needed to soar, and soar she did. The training and encouragement she received at *The Sewing Labs* made all the difference for her.

