

No Patterns Needed By 88-Year-Old Seamstress

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Franklin Co. Correspondent
McCONNELLSBURG (Fulton Co.)— When a woman in Florida needed a wedding gown recently, she had a friend draw a picture of the dress she envisioned.

She sent the sketch and her measurements to a seamstress in McConnellsburg. When the bride came north a few days before her wedding, she tried on the completed dress.

"The only alteration it needed was an extra ruffle on the bottom," said Yvonne Metcalfe, the 88-year-old seamstress who created the pink gown.

Metcalfe regularly creates finery for weddings in southcentral Pennsylvania and northern Maryland. Often, the bride and her attendants come to Metcalfe with pictures torn from a magazine or catalog, and she reproduces the dresses exactly. She cannot explain how she can take a piece of fabric and cut out the correct shapes for an elaborate gown without an exact pattern. "It just comes natural to me," she said. "I just do it."

Sometimes she uses a pattern from another gown, and varies both the shape and size for the dress the customer has in mind.

She occasionally sews from purchased patterns, which customers bring to her when they want a specific garment.

All this creativity takes place in a small, neat room in Metcalfe's home. Thirty or 40 garments in various stages of completion hang on racks. Pegboards on the wall hold hundreds of spools of thread. Pinned to the curtain beside the sewing machine are pictures of dresses that customers want her to duplicate.

The small, well-dressed woman grew up watching her mother make clothing for her large family. Metcalfe made her first article of clothing at age 15 -- a dress for herself. "My mother put the sleeves in for me," she said.

After graduating from high school she went to work as a fitter at a clothing factory in Hagerstown, Md. "I've been sewing ever since," she said. She operated her own tailor shop for a few years after she left the factory.

Twenty years ago, she and her

husband, who are childless, moved to McConnellsburg to be near a niece. Metcalfe decided to quit sewing. After her husband died, however, she decided she needed something to keep her busy.

The sewing business has amply fulfilled that need.

"I'm sewing more now than I ever did," Metcalfe said. She starts sewing about 10 o'clock in the morning and continues until 10 or 11 o'clock at night.

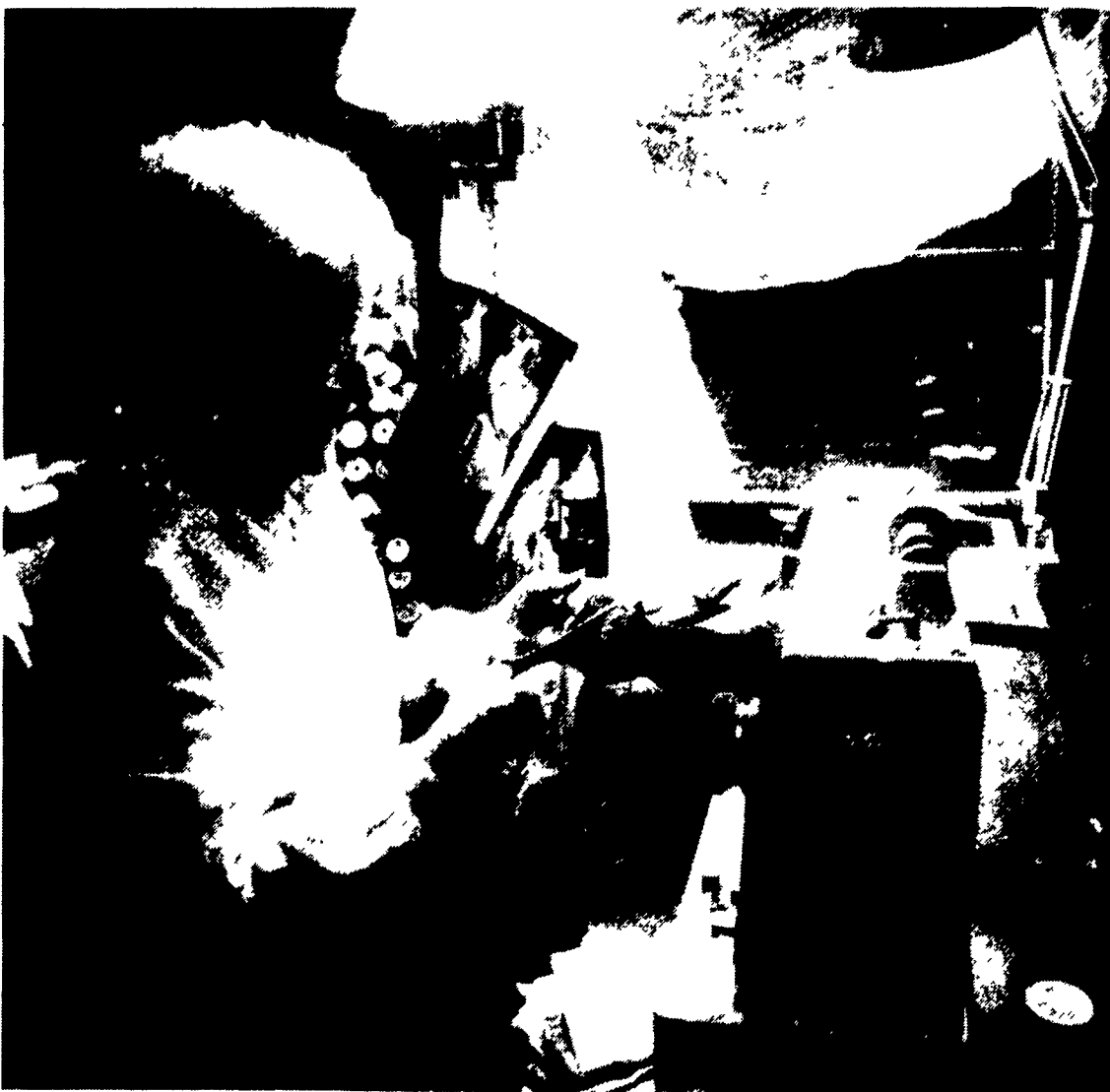
"I don't do anything else, though," she added. "I have a heart condition, so I have someone to do my housework."

Metcalfe has never felt the need to advertise her services. "I have more business than I can do now."

"My family fusses me for doing it," she added, "but they don't know the happiness I get out of it. I'm lucky to have good health, and I'm blessed with good eyesight."

While she feels she "shouldn't take the time" to go to the local senior citizens center once a week for a noontime meal, she admits that it's nice to get out occasionally. Metcalfe is not lonely by any means, though. "People are in and out of here all the time to pick up and drop off clothes."

She has sewn the clothing for three weddings since May, while keeping up with the numerous alterations she does on men's clothing. "They weren't all complete weddings, though," she added. "Some were just the bridesmaids and the flower girls." She esti-



Yvonne Metcalfe, 88, creates wedding and prom gowns for customers in two states. Photo courtesy of PUBLIC OPINION.

mates it takes her two days to make a gown from start to finish, if she worked only on that project.

"I have four weddings (scheduled) through next June," she said. "And prom dresses (are needed) at the same time. I'm going to be busy next spring."

A bride recently sent Metcalfe a picture of herself in her mother's wedding gown, which Metcalfe had made many years ago. Metcalfe located a photo of the original wedding party and observed, "These dresses look 'homemade' to me now."

While Metcalfe's favorite projects are the prom and wedding gowns, she does "a little bit of everything," including Halloween costumes and high school band uniforms. Her most unusual project to date was a pair of pants for an incontinent dog.

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For Your Information

The most popular variety of cheese with Americans is cheddar. Unfortunately, it is also one of the highest-fat cheeses. Around 65% of the calories in a one-inch cube of cheddar cheese comes from fat. (Tufts University Diet and Nutrition Letter, April 1990)

According to the National Traffic Safety administration, car crashes are the leading cause of worker absenteeism.

By the time today's child turns "seventysomething", he/she will have spent a full seven years in front of the television. (Tufts University Diet and Nutrition Letter, July 1990)

On the average day, Americans spend \$2,021,918 on home exercise equipment and \$10,410,959 on potato chips. (Tom Heyman, On an average day, Ballantine Books, 1989)