By Becky Neeley
Keith County News

Shanel Regier has known since grade school that she wanted to be an artist. Art was her favorite subject, even into high school when she was under the tutelage of Susan Hanson, the art teacher at Wheatland High.

Regier, the daughter of Dori Regier of Imperial, and Phil and Cindy Regier of Ogallala, graduated from Wheatland in 1999 and chose to pursue her art career by attending the Milwaukee Institute of Art and Design.

“I wanted to go to a college that focused on arts and I also wanted to live in a city. I applied to Minneapolis, Chicago and Milwaukee. Milwaukee gave me a decent scholarship, so I decided to go there,” Regier said.

Regier studied sculpture, but it wasn’t until her senior year at MIAD that she found what would become her career: clothing design, or as Regier refers to it, “wearable art.”

In 2005, Regier opened her own clothing design studio in a commercial and residential loft space of an old building. As she had majored in sculpture, she was not formally trained in clothing design. This fact may have made it difficult to be hired by a company, so starting her own business was the logical choice for Regier.

“I am self-taught; I learned through trial and error. If you want to pursue a career in fashion design and want to work for a design company or label other than yourself, you will need to take the appropriate fashion class-es in college,” Regier said. “If you are interested in working for yourself, you may not need to take classes or get a degree in fashion design, but I would encourage you (aspiring clothing designers) to teach yourself as much as you can through practice, reading, internships or apprenticing.”

Marsha Lee, a high school friend of Regier’s, also is pursuing a career in fashion design. Lee studied at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln and was hired by clothing companies in Oregon and New York City, an accomplishment made possible by her formal training. Regier and Lee are now in the same industry, but took different paths to get there.

“I had not planned on making this my career, but the right opportunities and support came along and I decided to see where this would lead me,” Regier said.

Regier’s line, which features a vintage feel, begins with the fabric. Regier considers how the fabric will handle, drape and sew, what sort of feel the fabric will lend to the finished piece, who would wear the piece and where.

“I really enjoy finding a great fabric and then designing the right dress or garment for that fabric,” Regier said. “I have always been interested in historical costume, as well as vintage clothing.”

Bridal gowns, bridal party dresses, mother’s dresses, as well as casual pieces round out Regier’s line, and each piece is one-of-a-kind, as she sews every piece by hand.

On Oct. 6, Regier will host a fashion show at Ogallala, and will highlight local models instead of the usual professional models from her other fashion shows.

“I was hesitant to come back and do a show; I have not spent much time in the community since I left in 1999 and really didn’t know what the interest level of people back home would be. But, my father, who has traveled to many of my shows in Milwaukee and Chicago, has always had such a great time attending that he thought it would be a great experience for people back home,” Regier said.

In addition to Regier's show, a 4-H fashion show will be held to highlight young aspiring fashion designers in the community.

"We all agreed that it is important to get young people interested in sewing and creating. I have found sewing and designing to be a very rewarding experience and have found that it has made me more of a well-rounded person. Sewing and designing requires patience, problem-solving, creativity and imagination, three-dimensional understanding and math, a subject I always hated in school, but I now use math in every project and design," Regier said.

She added that aspiring clothing designers need to start early and practice.

"Sew as much as you can, because the hands-on experience is crucial."

As Regier's current schedule is "quite hectic," her stepmother Cindy Regier, her father and Julie Peterson of the Silver Thimble have aided her by organizing and planning the event to make the local girl's homecoming possible.

The show begins at 7 p.m. in the Ogallala High School Lecture Hall. Tickets can be purchased in advance in the Silver Thimble, Adams Bank and Trust, Pinnacle Bank and The Clothing Closet, or at the door.

For more information, contact Peterson at (308) 284-6838.