



History and fantasy collide for cosplay costume designer

Megan Murray models all kinds of fashions when she walks a runway. In her spare time she's also a designer, escaping to worlds of fantasy.

Meet a 22-year-old Kitchener cosplayer who's building a business by having fun with fashion.

You might have seen cosplayers at a local convention such as Kitchener Comic Con or Tri-City Super Con. Participants dress as pop culture characters. Cosplay has its roots in Japan, but the role-playing fad is a global



Lynn Haddrall

phenomenon now.

It's a way to pay tribute to your favourite fictional characters, and a way to connect with others who adamantly share your passion, Murray explains.

"To put it in its simplest terms, cosplay stands for costume play. Just think

Halloween, but any time of the year. You take the Halloween aspect of wanting to dress up and make costumes, and you mix it with just a love of whatever character it is."

Most cosplayers create their own outfits, dressing as characters from film, science fiction, video games and comic books.

They attend conventions where they show off their fashions, meet fellow enthusiasts, and talk with actors who play the iconic roles.

That's how Murray got hooked. When she was in Grade 11 at St. Mary's High School,

a friend suggested attending Fan Expo in Toronto, one of the biggest gatherings in the country. It has featured appearances from actors including Lucy Lawless (Xena, of "Warrior Princess" fame), Paul Wesley (Stefan Salvatore in "The Vampire Diaries") and William Shatner ("Star Trek").

Murray went dressed as Black Widow, a Marvel comic book character recently played by Scarlett Johansson.

"It was my first one. I had thrown together a costume from a Halloween store," she recalls. Laughing at the memory, she adds: "It was so bad. But it was a first try and it was fun."

Murray pursued her love of cosplay with like-minded students while studying broadcast TV at Conestoga College. Academically, she found herself drawn to work behind the camera, such as set and costume design. Friends asked her to help with their short films.

Murray graduated from Conestoga in 2016 and launched her online shop on Etsy in 2017. She calls it Valkyrie Custom Wear. A Valkyrie is a fierce female character from Norse mythology.

"The Norse influence was the main reason behind choosing the name Valkyrie for my shop, but it's also a nod to my geeky/pop-culture side. Marvel has a superhero named Valkyrie and she's amazing. I wanted the name to evoke images of something beautiful and powerful."

Murray specializes in made-to-order costumes ranging from simple Viking tunics to elaborate wedding gowns like the one featured in the Purple Wedding episode of "Game of Thrones." Prices go from \$200 to \$500 but can be higher based on fabrics and the detail work required.

She has carved out a design and sewing space in the kitchen area of the Kitchener home she shares with her mother, Sharon. Sadly, her father, Rick, died in 2012, but her grandparents live nearby and offer

lots of support.

Murray's basement, previously home to an archery range and Viking costumes, now stores a lot of fabric. When not working part time at Winners, Murray sits at her Singer sewing machine creating magical attire for cosplayers who are hoping to release their inner heroes. They reach out to her from around the world.

"I'll make something and I'll need to print out the shipping label and I'll be like, wow, this is going to France or this is going to Florida, this is going to Denmark, and I'm like, this is cool."

Outdoor festivals are a good place for Murray to connect with customers and aficionados. The Oxford Renaissance Festival is a summer event held in Dorchester, Ont., which also holds a New Year's Eve Masquerade Ball. Murray was working on an Elizabethan gown for that event.

"I have a wedding dress as my base, in my car. It's an '80s monstrosity, but it will be good for the base. I can take out the sleeves and dye it and use that as the big poof."

Valkyrie customers usually have a character or costume in mind when they contact Murray. But some, like a recent customer from Wisconsin, work collaboratively with her to design a costume based on a concept. That one was based on a seldom-seen character in the "Game of Thrones" series.

Murray likes to capture the customer's vision. "Just going back and forth and actually coming up with this design with someone is so much fun."

Examples of other recent projects are displayed on mannequins in her home. A long gown features hundreds of hand-rolled roses, carefully braided leather vines, stretch velour leaves, and silver flower buttons. It is painstaking detail work, but Murray knows the joy it will bring to the people who assume the roles of their favourite characters.

Murray understands the thrill of wearing

CENTURY 21
Heritage House Ltd.
BROKERAGE

The
RED CARPET
Crew

*Raising the Standard
of Your
Real Estate Experience*

**Roger &
Julie D. Martin**
Sales Representatives

OUR TEAM OFFICE
Unit 8 - 300 Gage Avenue
Kitchener, Ontario
519.888.9977

519.580.3505
julie.martin@century21.ca

519.575.3505
roger.martin@century21.ca



www.TheRedCarpetCrew.com

* Independently Owned & Operated. ®/TM Trademarks owned by Century 21 Real Estate LLC, used under license or authorized sub-license. © 2012 Century 21 Canada Limited Partnership.

designs created by someone else. She joined Gemini Models more than two years ago and walked her first runway at a Fashion on Yonge show in Toronto, where new designers showcase their own work.

"It's always so fun to wear the new designers' clothing. They're not necessarily mass marketing or trying to sell that particular line; it's a project for school that they get to show, so normally it's the most fun things."

While she enjoys modelling, Murray's focus is firmly on costume creation these days. She draws inspiration from a long list of hobbies, including her background in horse-riding, archery and combat choreography.

"I have always found it weirdly relaxing doing any sort of fight choreography. It feels like dancing because you have all the different steps. I like fantasy and anything historical and it really appeals to that side of me."

A friend who is making a short film asked Murray to play a shield maiden. She's preparing with kickboxing lessons and sword-fighting classes. At a lean five feet, 10 inches tall, she will be an imposing female warrior.

"I want to know what I'm doing when I do this. Whenever they need someone to be a side warrior, or be shot, I'm like: 'I die well,' she says, beaming.

Asked to choose her favourite cosplay character, she pauses. How can she choose? On any given weekend, Murray could channel her inner Lara Croft ("Tomb Raider"), Spike ("Buffy the Vampire Slayer"), or Dottie Underwood ("Agent Carter").

Eventually, she settles on her current favourite – Lagertha, the shield maiden who rises to Queen in the popular "Vikings" television series.

There's no hesitation, however, when Murray describes the costumes that get the biggest response at conventions.

"I get the most reactions when I'm in Disney characters. I feel sometimes that adults or even other teenagers or cosplayers feel a little bit more awkward trying to freak



CURIOUS ABOUT COSPLAY?

Here are Megan Murray's helpful tips for beginners:

- Find a character you love and don't be too hard on yourself while making your first outfit.
- Don't take yourself too seriously. You will get better the more you do it. And you can get lots of advice from cosplayers at conventions.
- The costumes are fun, but don't overlook the camaraderie you will discover as you interact with other cosplayers.
- Local go-to places for material and costume pieces: Len's Mill Stores, Value Village and Talize.
- Try local conventions first before diving headfirst into the big ones.
- If you see somebody in costume, go up and talk to them. Ask them what they're doing, ask them what character they are, if they have any tips and tricks.
- You don't have to make your own costumes to be a cosplayer. "It's more about wearing them and getting into the character and being a part of the community. Just be the character and have fun. That's the important thing."

Costume designer Megan Murray displays some of her creations with help from Angela Fay Bannister, left, wearing a dress designed for the Christmas/Yule season, and Romy Done, right, in a costume inspired by "Game of Thrones."

RAJEEMAN PHOTOGRAPHY

out about something," she says. "But kids have absolutely no problem with saying 'that's my favourite character. I'm going to go and hug her now.' It's wonderful."

Her favourite convention moment involved a costume that was a cross between Elsa from "Frozen" and a female character from the video game "Assassin's Creed." "Because why wouldn't that go together?" she quips.

"I was dressed up as an Assassin Elsa. I had the wig, coat, her colours and there were snowflakes. I like to think most people got it, but there was one little girl about three or four years old across the convention hall. She looked up and ran from her parents full-tilt down the hallway, screamed 'Elsa' and just launched herself at me. I managed to catch her and it was adorable."

Murray retains her childlike wonder with every project she tackles, moving far beyond her first Black Widow costume. Today, her attention to detail means spending hours braiding leather or creating hundreds of roses to attach to the bottom of a long train. She describes her personal style as eclectic, an extension of her many hobbies and a chance to wear one of her 10 coloured wigs.

"All the different things that I do influence the style that I have," Murray says, taking a break from her latest cosplay sewing project.

"For me, fashion is fun. It's clothing. It isn't going to hurt anything. Whatever you're wearing, the worst you're going to do is maybe offend someone's sensibility of style. So have fun with it. You only live once."

Or maybe you can live more than once by donning a costume to release your inner warrior. Murray can help you with that. 

State-of-the-Art Approach to Skin Rejuvenation



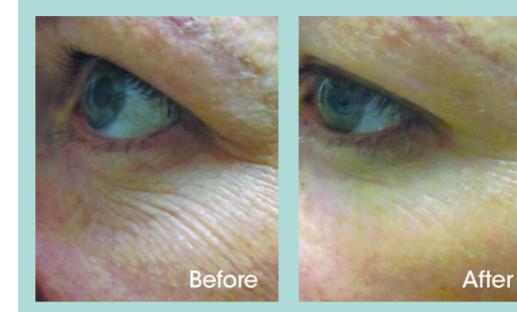
You - and Improved!

Fibroblast Skin Tightening

treats a number of areas, including

- Forehead lines and frown lines
- Crow's feet, upper and lower eyelids
- Upper and lower lip • Neck and jowls
- Abdomen and navel

Microneedling using Procell Therapies, provides visual improvements in fine lines and wrinkles, acne scars, stretch marks, sun damage and skin discoloration.



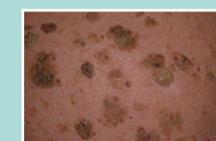
Spider Veins



Skintags



Warts



Seborrheic Keratosis

We specialize in the removal of most skin irregularities and all types of skin growths.



TOTAL SKIN & BODY
ANTI-AGING SPA

Complimentary consultations

385 Frederick St. Mall, Kitchener
(15 minutes from Guelph)

519.576.2250 • www.totalskinandbody.ca