

The Post and Courier

Putting Charleston on fashion map

Krekel working to make city a major destination

By [Warren Wise](#)

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Carriage rides, shrimp and grits and historic plantations.

Charleston is known around the world and on many a list as a top-notch destination for food and tourism.



Provided

Rosanna Krekel, a Lowcountry transplant from New York City who has worked in marketing, advertising and publishing since 1985 for some of the top magazines in the country, believes Charleston can be the next great fashion capital.

But what about fashion?

A few designers have set up shop on King Street, recently named one of the Top 10 shopping streets in America.

Among them are Louisiana native Billy Reid and New York City's Cynthia Rowley, with their namesake shops. Big national upscale names have calling cards in the city as well: Gucci, Louis Vuitton and Lacoste, just to name a few.

Up and down King Street and across the region hundreds of local and nationally owned stores carry apparel, jewelry and shoes for every taste.

But one person has launched a drive to bring all the different elements together and put the Holy City on the map as a fashion destination on par with New York, Paris and Milan.

Rosanna Krekel, a Lowcountry transplant from New York City who has worked in marketing, advertising and publishing since 1985 for some of the top magazines in the country, believes Charleston can be the next great fashion capital.

"The city is written up constantly for its great food and hospitality," she said. "That same sort of emphasis can be put on fashion. There is a real opportunity to make Charleston a fashion destination."

The Sullivan's Island resident owns her own marketing and consulting company, La Vita e Bella, which is Italian for "life is beautiful," but she holds an equally important title as well.

She's the regional director of Fashion Group International Charleston, a local nonprofit aiming to lure major designers to the city, establish an education component and possibly attract fashion-related business ventures to the Lowcountry.

Global exposure

Krekel launched the local fashion chapter just a year ago, securing more than 40 business members, the minimum, to be sanctioned by Fashion Group International.

Speaking by phone in between meetings with clients in New York last week, Krekel said just getting the Fashion Group International chapter started gives Charleston exposure on an international stage. There are only 36 regions around the world with the Fashion Group International designation. Charleston is one of them.

Rosanna Krekel

Name: Rosanna Giacalone Krekel

Born: October 1963, Long Island, N.Y.

Family: Husband, Tig Krekel; one stepson, Michael Krekel, 23.

Residence: Sullivan's Island

Education: State University of New York at Stonybrook, major in Spanish and minor in business, 1985; University of Salamanca in Spain, studied Spanish language and literature.

Work experience: Advertising and marketing, 1985-92; publishing 1992-2008 with mostly management positions at Elle, Rolling Stone, Life & Style, Glamour and Robb Report; 2008 started La Vita e Bella, a marketing and consulting firm specializing in media, fashion, beauty and luxury markets.

By joining the group, the Holy City is listed in the worldwide directory and members begin to exchange information.

"Charleston enters an international playground," she said.

The city will attract well-versed speakers who can talk on big-picture issues such as retail, beauty and design, further punctuating the city as a place to do business in the fashion world.

For instance, in December the local chapter sponsored retail guru Robin Lewis, vice president of a retail consulting arm of Goldman Sachs who made some bold predictions about industry.

Krekel said retail is a big part of the fashion business, but there is a lot more to fashion than storefronts.

"People hear fashion, and they hear clothing," she said. "It's so much more. It's apparel, accessories, jewelry, home, design, manufacturing, distribution, advertising, communication, publishing and consulting. The scope of the industry is huge, and we have a huge opportunity to build on it right here."

She readily admits the effort is large but doable with the right resources, including a multipronged approach to support Charleston's fledgling fashion movement.

"We need to keep bringing all the key talent of the city together to help build this," she said. "There is no doubt there has to be an education piece. We want the best programming for students to learn the fashion industry, and then we want them to stay and work here. We get the talent and keep them here, and we attract other talent.

"With the appropriate tax breaks, industries will choose to come to Charleston to open a business or build a manufacturing plant."

Making it happen

With the infrastructure in place, Krekel believes in five years Charleston will be as well known for fashion as it is for food, culture and tourism today.

"What Spoleto has done for the arts here, Charleston could do it with fashion," she said. "I see us one day hosting international conferences. We love, love, love the city. We think it's the closest thing to Europe in America with its beauty and Old World charm."

Cynthia Rowley store manager Lindsay Fleege believes the drive to propel Charleston to fashion greatness is doable.

"We already house other designers here and in New York that get a lot of press, and they are thought of as fashion labels," she said. "We already have that aspect. It just needs to grow and build."

King Street's designation as one of the Top 10 shopping streets in America doesn't go unnoticed in the fashion world either, Fleege said.

"There are a lot of elements already here in Charleston that can support fashion," she added.

Among those is Charleston Fashion Week, slated for March 20-24. The five-night celebration under the tents in Marion Square will feature 45 runway shows, an emerging designer

competition, a spring bridal show and model competition.

Krekel is not involved in it, but the show definitely plays into her effort.

"We both share the same goal and mission to cultivate and showcase on a national level the area's fashion community which includes design and retail," Charleston Fashion Week Style Director Ayoka Lucas said. "Since 2007, Charleston Fashion Week has been instrumental in accomplishing these goals, which only proved that this area is receptive and ready for world-renowned fashion membership groups such as Fashion Group International to make roots here.

"While the lowcountry traditionally has not been regarded as a fashion capital, Charleston is an area rich in talent and boutiques that can (compete) and are competing with those on the runway in Milan, Paris, New York and Los Angeles," Lucas said. "Events like CFW and membership groups such as FGI, are key to uniting the local artisans, designers, boutique owners and creative communities of Charleston. The efforts of many, like Rosanna in this area, are proving to further put Charleston on the fashion map and make many stand up and take notice."

Marshall Simon, owner of Gwynn's in Mount Pleasant, fully supports Krekel's effort and gives her all the credit for leading the charge.

"Our business is fashion, and we are very passionate about that," he said.

He is working with Krekel and others on several initiatives to put the stamp on Charleston as a fashion destination, but he said they are still in the works and haven't been totally vetted.

Once more people get involved, he believes Krekel's efforts will take off.

"She is making this whole thing happen," Simon said.

But Krekel doesn't see her passion for fashion as a job.

"It's like doing volunteer work," she said. "This is something I love, and it doesn't feel like work because I love it."

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