

Local artist designs 'Fredericksburg' bow tie

By LISA CHINN

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ARILYNN MENDELL never knotted a bow tie around her own neck. But that didn't stop her from designing one.

"One day, I just thought, 'Heck, I can paint bow ties,'" said Mendell, who lives on the bank of the Rappahannock River in Fredericksburg.

The water inspired her to paint a white tie with light and dark blue stripes. And before she knew it, Beau Ties Ltd. of Vermont had turned her watercolor vision into a proper gentleman's accessory.

"We have converted her design to printed fabric," Bill Kenerson, who co-owns the mail-order company with his wife, Deb Venman, writes in their summer catalogue. "Thanks to Marilynn for her fine work."

The couple, who began their bow-tie business in 1993, dubbed Mendell's design the "Fredericksburg." It's pictured on the front cover of the new catalogue, which offers four fresh patterns. Mendell's is the only one featured full-size inside the front flap.

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"It's a nice, poppy design," Kenerson said in a telephone interview from Vermont. "Those are great summer colors."

The silk-twill bow tie sells for \$35. But that's beside the point for Mendell, 56, who grew up moving around the world with a businessman dad who rarely donned traditional ties.

"I really wanted ties that reminded me of my father," she said.

In addition to her dad, she has three grown sons and a significant other to buy for. All those men in her life meant Mendell was giving Beau Ties Ltd. a bonanza of business.

The company, based in Middlebury, Vt., sells bow ties in plenty of patterns, including a plethora of polka dots and paisley prints, and assorted stripes that run this way and that.

The charming chokers are loaded with little lobsters and be-decked with itty-bitty barbecue grills. Others are garnished with golf balls or saturated with cigars, martinis, even Volkswagens.

But Mendell had designs of her own when she created the "Fredericksburg."

"This tie reminds me of sort of sitting at the yacht club at the end of a summer day with a sunburn, just after a shower," said Mendell, who also pictures herself sipping a gin and tonic.

She painted the design in watercolors on her way to work as director of business development for the architectural marketing firm Sorg and Associates in Washington.

"It's relaxing. It's very peaceful, and it's rewarding," she said about working with watercolors.

"Not many people do [that] on the train, but I'm one of them."

She went wild, painting blue ties with white shapes, yellow ties with white dots and curlicues, and red ties with gold stars. And she scratched notes here and there to entice the company.

"Sailors would go wild for this patterning," she scrawled near the white tie she painted with blue stripes.

The watercolors stayed on her desk for months before she sent them off. But they were an instant hit once they reached Vermont.

Few clients send original designs, Kenerson said. In fact, the only other customer-created bow tie the company sells is called "Freedom," decorated in a patriotic pattern developed by a bow-tie enthusiast in Carlisle, Pa.

Mendell is counting on her own design to be a hit for Father's Day later this month. She's thrilled about her bow tie and the fact that it was named after Fredericksburg, the historic city she calls home.

Besides, she said, "I get to see it on my man."