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Toys headed for the dumpster become window art at Wit and Whim in Port Washington

11:48 AM By Tara Conry



Photo credit: Tara Conry | Wit and Whim staff member Sydney Ruben, 17, of Port Washington, assisted local kids with an "upcycle everyday" project in the store's backyard. (April 28, 2013)

A pair of rubber duckies, a SpongeBob SquarePants figurine and an Etch-a-Sketch were among the toys that were slated for the junkyard, but instead earned a second life Sunday in Port Washington.

More than a dozen kids gathered in the backyard of Laurie Scheinman's shop, Wit and Whim, to take part in an "everyday upcycle" project as part of the store's monthlong celebration of Earth Day.

While Scheinman, 50, and her staff wielded hot glue guns, the children dug through tubs of broken and unwanted toys, meticulously selecting the ones they wanted to place on two wooden 'W's' that would soon hang in

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the store's window display.

PHOTOS: Sites of Port Washington | **TWITTER:** @tarakonry | @NewsdayTowns

"I think that it's really cool to see toys that are going to be art instead of being thrown away," said Michele Lanfant, 9, of Port Washington, while admiring her work.

...ilies like the Johnsons. When Liz Kase-Johnson, 40, of Port Washington, learned that Scheinman was collecting toy parts she saw it as an opportunity to clean out her attic and teach her children, Lucy, 3, and Sam, 8, a lesson.

"It makes them feel aware of the waste in our house and the plastic-ness of the toys that are generated today," she said. "This is an exciting idea to give kids the inspiration of transforming garbage into art."

The concept of reinvention and giving old items a new life defines Scheinman's store. Much of the merchandise inside the stop, located at 6 Carlton Ave., are vintage or have been "upcycled."

"Everything in this store has a story," said Scheinman, who travels around the world to find unique items to sell in her store. "I don't buy it if I don't know the story."

After paying her store's rent and small staff, Schneiman donates all her profits to charities and will only carry new merchandise if the manufacturer gives back in some way.

Scheinman, a 15-year Port Washington resident and mother of five, opened Wit and Whim in September 2012 as a passion project, but she's spent most of her life working as a family and child therapist.

"I do love hanging out with kids," she said while helping the children with the project, which will hang in her store's window throughout May.

"Sometimes we just throw things out," she told them. "But every time you walk by you are going to see you were a part of this."

By hosting events like this throughout the year, Scheinman's store has become more than just a shop. It's also a community gathering place, explained Kase-Johnson.

"Laurie is an absolute inspiration to the community," she added.

Laurie Kaufman, 41, came all the way from Forest Hills with her daughter, Abigail, 6, to participate in Sunday's event. They heard about it from Abigail's grandmother, Susan Nathanson, of Great Neck, who often shops at Wit and Whim.

"It is the most imaginative, creative, funky and interesting store," Nathanson said. "I hope that she [Abigail] learns that things don't have to be discarded. There's another use for them."

Tags: Port Washington , Wit and Whim , Town Focus

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