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March 2008 | On Our Radar

Swap-O-Rama-Rama

For years, thrift stores have been a great source of second-hand clothing, and there's never a better feeling than dumping all your out-of-date clothing into a donation bin. Now, there's a new way to revamp your wardrobe and recycle your unwanted clothing, all while letting your creative juices flow.

Most people are familiar with swap meets, but the Swap-O-Rama-Rama is not your typical swap meet. At this swap participants bring their unwanted clothing, sheets or other fabrics and toss them onto the community stockpile where others then pick through this "fiber trash" and create their own fashion treasures. Expert instructors and volunteers are available to help with transformations.

New York activist Wendy Tremayne came up with the idea for the Swap-O-Rama-Rama to bring people together to become creators rather than consumers.

"Swap-O-Rama-Rama invites the discovery that the making of things is not an activity to be avoided in order to attain leisure but rather a playful and leisurely endeavor unto itself," Tremayne says. The first swap took place in 2005 in New York City, with 500 people attending the event. But, within one year, swaps turned up in more than 20 cities and have since gone worldwide with events in Turkey, Panama and Israel.

This month Swap-O-Rama-Rama is being brought to Illinois by a mother-daughter team, Jennie and Katie Hawkey, in hopes of raising funds for a new folk arts school at Three Sisters Park in Chillocothe, Ill. It was daughter Katie's idea to bring the swap to Chicago. "I've been living in Chicago for the past three years, and I've been really impressed with the DIY crafting community here," says Katie. "Not only can we reach out to more people in Chicago, but there is such a supportive collective of artists and crafters here who I know will love Swap-O-Rama-Rama."

The first of two all-day events will take place in Chicago on March 29 at AV-aerie, 2000 W. Fulton, Suite 310, an organization that provides resources for local, community-based cultural, social and environmental initiatives. The second swap will be on April 12 at Three Sisters Park in Chillocothe. Admission to both events is a bag of clothing and a suggested donation of \$20 for adults and \$10 for students and seniors. Proceeds will benefit the Three Sisters Folk Arts School, AV-aerie and the parent organization Swap-O-Rama-Rama. For more information, visit swap-IL.com.

— Ashley Mastandrea

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Recycle your old clothes and make something new at Swap-O-Rama-Rama in Chicago on March 29. Photo: Courtesy of Swap-O-Rama-Rama

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