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## Festival turns rags to riches

By Susan Kelleher  
Seattle Times staff reporter

Clare Cronkleton's crochet hook crinkled through strips of plastic Sunday afternoon as she twisted and turned shredded grocery bags into a lively patchwork that could soon find its way to her bathroom floor.

"My family thinks I'm crazy, but now I have found validation," Cronkleton joked, as her bathmat took shape amid the hum of about a dozen sewing machines during the city's second Swap-O-Rama-Rama.

Billed as a communal clothing swap and do-it-yourself workshop for those exploring new ways to reuse material, the event at the Ballard branch of the Seattle Public Library and Ballard Commons Park attracted up to 300 people over two days as part of the fourth annual Sustainable Ballard festival.

"I thought it would be cool, but people latched on to it right away," said swap organizer Denise Henrikson, 42, of West Seattle. "Sustainability, to me, is taking what exists and using it before you start using resources to make something new. All it takes is your time and creativity."

Henrikson ran a similar event earlier this year, but she said Sunday's swap was more successful because of the help she received from students at Ballard High School, who organized a clothing drive and helped sort the clothes.

As Cronkleton taught how to use a Tunisian crochet stitch to make cushy plastic mats, other volunteers helped people design and sew new apparel from piles of donated clothes. Some participants brought their own clothes and left with everything from simple hats to elaborate dresses.

"I'm treating this as sort of an artistic challenge," said Kylee Peterson, 30, a graduate student in the University of Washington's biology program who made a flouncy tiered skirt from a white window valance and someone else's forgettable brown skirt.

Most of the creations tended to the clownish, but others were inspired little gems like the leopard-print purse that Ava Schmidt, 7, turned out from a skirt she found in the pile, and the eye-catching shirt that Rachel Pittman, 25, of Fort Worth, Texas, was crafting from a knitted blue scarf and the remnants of a black-and-white striped shirt.

"I want it to be trendy but unique enough to make someone ask 'Where'd you get that?'" Pittman said.

Linda Turkstra, 36, of Woodinville, who, for years, has turned her children's old clothing into stuffed animals, said she appreciated the communal aspect of the event.

"I've been doing it at home by myself, and it's nice to be a part of a community that likes the same things I do," she said.

Similar swaps have been held in about 40 cities since 2005, when New Yorker Wendy Tremayne came up with the idea as an alternative to consumerism. Tremayne now lives in New Mexico, where she is building a bed-and-breakfast from recycled materials.

Clothes left over from Sunday's event will be given to the Ballard Food Bank's community closet.

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enlarge THOMAS JAMES HURST / THE SEATTLE TIMES

Seven-year-old Ava Schmidt watches as Anna McKee, a volunteer at the Swap-O-Rama-Rama, helps her sew a purse out of a discarded skirt on Sunday. The clothing swap and do-it-yourself workshop helped people transform old apparel and donated items into new clothing or other creations.

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