

Sunday Profile

A NONPROFIT CREATED BY HAND

DIY Studio's creator mixes vision, will

By Laura Fosmire
Statesman Journal

Jessica Ramey is undoubtedly an artist.

But her art is not selective, exquisite, fragile; the kind one admires in a gallery with a "don't touch" sign. It's a little rough around the edges. It's cozy. It's down-to-earth and homemade. It serves a purpose.

Ramey, director and co-founder of the DIY Studio in downtown Salem, is a staple among local artists. She has a chicken coop in the yard of her South Salem home made from her children's old playset. For years, she taught crafting out of her garage. She made the floral arrangements for her own wedding.

She is very much a representative for Oregon's do-it-yourself, or DIY, movement: creative, artistic, and cheerfully convinced that anyone can do it.

Growing up in the arts

Ask Ramey where she's from and she'll laugh — and then begin tracing a childhood that looped around the edges of the country to the deep south and to the northeast. The family moved to North Carolina when Ramey was just a baby, then up to Maine when she was 5 years old.

"As a child, in Maine, it was a completely different way of life," she said. "We lived in a teeny, tiny town. It was a different demographic completely. I'd grown up in Maine and we were pretty wealthy, comparatively, and even then we still lived in a trailer park that didn't have paved roads."

Her use of art and creative problem-solving emerged early on. As a child, Ramey said she didn't have the Dream House Barbie or trendy, expensive toys. Instead, she'd make her own dolls out of catalog clipings and build her own doll house.

By the time she was 12, the family had moved back to Aloha. Ramey attended high school in Hillsboro, where she remembers practically living in the art department. From there, Ramey went on to attend the University of Oregon in Eugene, where she knew right away she wanted to major in the fine arts.

"It became something that I felt like I excelled at," she said. "I felt like I could communicate with people through art. It became an avenue to understand things."

It was also at the University of Oregon where Ramey met her husband, Jason. The two lived in McClain Hall — Jason on the first floor, Jessica on the second. She recalls her two first impressions of Jason: One, he was kind of cute. And two, he was kind of egotistical.

"He was a jokerster, prankster guy," she said. "Eventually we started hanging out. And then there were three consecutive nights where we stayed up and all we did was hang out. I remember a friend of ours, Kevin, telling me, 'Jess. You need to tell him you like him.'"

Jessica and Jason married in



Jessica Ramey, director and co-founder of the DIY Studio, is very involved in the community and helping people express themselves through creativity. KOBBI R. BLAIR / STATESMAN JOURNAL

JESSICA RAMEY

Age: 35

Hometown: Hillsboro

Family: Husband, Jason. Two kids, 11-year-old Annabella and 8-year-old William

Pets: Two chickens and three cats

Career: Director of the DIY Studio

School: Graduated from the University of Oregon in 2001

Favorite book: "Miss Rumphius" by Barbara Cooney

Favorite food: Pizza

2001, the weekend after graduation. And even the wedding was do-it-yourself.

Jason remembers Jessica ordering the flowers online, and how she stayed up all night to organize the floral arrangements. And they both remember that Jessica was seized with the urge to reupholster all the furniture.

"I was crazy," Jessica Ramey said, laughing. "We had our rehearsal dinner in the backyard, and I wanted nicer-looking furniture, which was crazy."

"She did that the night of the wedding," Jason recalled. "Most people have a bachelorette party, and here is she, doing the couch. I don't know what possessed her to do that."

Launching the DIY Studio

In the years after graduation, Ramey worked as a graphic designer for the university; as a freelance designer based in Prineville; many years as a stay-at-home mom and even a (very) brief stint with the state Department of Revenue. It lasted only three months.

"It was awful," Ramey gushed. "It was just not rewarding for me. It could have been for somebody else. If I know something's not working for me, I'll admit the failure and move on."



Jessica Ramey, director and co-founder of the DIY Studio, restocks the Little Free Library outside her downtown Salem studio. KOBBI R. BLAIR / STATESMAN JOURNAL

After quitting, Ramey began taking action on launching a creative re-use center in Salem, similar to the ones she had seen in Portland and Eugene. But the idea of leaving behind a full-time, well-paying job and benefits for starting her own business didn't scare her.

"I've learned so much," she said. "Sometimes you have to go through stuff to learn."

DIY Studio officially started in May 2013. Before that, Ramey had been running a similar, for-profit recycling and craft center out of her garage, teaching basic arts and crafts classes to adults and children alike.

"As an artist myself, you spend a lot of time trying to collect materials," she said. "I realized we needed a place in Salem and tried to fuse the two together; a re-use center for collecting things that are normally thrown in the trash or just in people's cupboards."

Ramey decided to make the DIY Studio a nonprofit venture. In its early stages, the studio occupied a 3,000-square-foot space in the Salem Center mall.

On Feb. 14, 2013, DIY Studio received nonprofit status. But just a few months later, the Salem Center found a vendor willing to rent the space at the full rental fee, and the studio began searching for another home. It was through a mutual friend that Ramey found a spot in the Salem Arts Building on Liberty Street. The grand opening was Nov. 1.

Since then, Ramey says carefully, it's been a challenge.

"It's good," she said. "I mean, we'd like to see more people know we're here. We're trying to fundraise to get a permanent location here and we're nowhere near our goal. Right now it's three people here. It's a lot of work."

Even so, Ramey said the studio is an important step in building a lasting arts community for Salem.

"It's more than just a business," she said. "I get to play and have fun, too. It's challenging and rewarding."

Bridging art, community

But even before the DIY Stu-

dio, Ramey had developed a pattern of bringing global or national art movements down to the local level.

About a year ago, she and a friend founded Salem's first Little Free Friday — a creative effort in which artists across the world leave their works in public places, freely available to anyone who wants them.

And it was the Rameys who launched Salem's first Little Free Library, a small collection of books in front of their South Salem home readily available to all. The effort has since spawned several other little libraries throughout the city.

Those who know Ramey aren't surprised. They say that's just how she is — a combination of creative ideas, artistic vision and the willpower to make it happen.

"She just gets involved," said Amber Padilla, a longtime friend of Ramey's. "A lot of us say, I really should, but she actually does it. It's hard to keep up with everything she does."

"I can think about being creative, but she's the one who says, that is a good idea and we're doing it," said husband Jason. "She is way more hands-on. She's the person that gets it done."

Another longtime friend, Angela Obery, remembers when Ramey first began floating the idea of the DIY Studio.

"I remember when she first started talking about wanting to have a re-use center, and there was no doubt in my mind it would happen," she said. "Because she's so capable. I knew she could make it happen."

When asked to choose three words to describe Ramey, friends and family all agreed on one: Creative.

"Not just craft creative," Obery clarified. "But just really creative in how she approaches challenges in her life."

lfosmire@StatesmanJournal.com, (503) 399-6709 or on Twitter @fosmirel

NW Oregon Realty Group
503-873-8600

NEW YEAR NEW CAREER!
8 Reasons to Choose a Career in Real Estate
#7 Recognition of Your Success – See Your Name Here
...next week #8
Call Connie Hinsdale Principal Broker/Owner 503-873-8600
To Discuss Career Opportunities

“WE KNOW THIS MARKET”

CONGRATULATIONS TO OUR TOP SALES AGENTS FOR 2013

Joe & Dana Giegerich
503-931-7824

Rosie Wilgus
503-409-8779

Ginni Stensland
503-510-4652

Cynthia Johnson
503-551-0145

Robin Kuhn
503-930-1896

WWW.NWOREGONREALTYGROUP.COM

<p>NEW LISTING!</p> <p>Income Producing 20Ac Farm Property 8Ac Ennis Hazelnut Orchard \$30+Annual Income, 2Well Maint. Hms, Shop, Barn \$529,000 MLS#673308 Joe Giegerich 503-931-7824</p>	<p>PRICE REDUCED!</p> <p>Beautiful Mountain Scenery Nice A-Frame Cabin on 1.24Ac w/Yr Round Creek, Nr Elkhorn Golf Course \$219,900 MLS#673213 Don Wertz 503-510-7725</p>	<p>PRICE REDUCED!</p> <p>Country Living on .79Ac XL Garage, Fncd Pasture Area, Room For Shop, Monitor Area, Silverton HS \$199,900 MLS#661933 Michael Day 503-931-7327</p>	<p>PRICE REDUCED!</p> <p>28.41Ac Agricultural Property Scenic Location in Molalla Hills, Christmas Tree Crop & Pine Timber, Road System \$199,900 MLS#673144 Joe Giegerich 503-931-7824</p>	<p>PRICE REDUCED!</p> <p>4.34Ac w/Custom Single Level Hm CherryWd Flrs, Granite Cntrs, Lrg Deck 56x76 Barn/Shop Fncd & Cross Fncd \$469,900 MLS#673180 Joe Giegerich 503-931-7824</p>	<p>OPEN HOUSE TODAY 1-4</p> <p>Bonus Rm, Many Updates, 2 City Lots 407 S 1st St, Silverton S Water St – Jersey St – Rt on 1st St \$165,000 MLS#672942 Amie Amsden 503-507-1216</p>
---	--	---	--	--	---