

Eco-friendly Vaya Bags



One Ridgewood woman has found a way to use her environmental science major in a rather fashionable, eco-friendly way.

Tianna Meilinger is the creator of Vaya Bags, a Ridgewood-based retail store and workshop that creates all-purpose, all-weather messenger bags.

Vaya Bags got its start in 2005, after Meilinger graduated from Boston University. She made her first messenger bag as she commuted to a temporary job around the city, and after many compliments, decided she should probably try her hand at making a few more. She did, and began selling them at arts and crafts fairs, where they were a hit.

Learning how to sew from her father while she lived on Long Island as a young girl, Meilinger always attended arts and crafts fairs with her family, so naturally the transition was smooth.

“I always had a respect for handmade crafts,” she said.

After moving to Ridgewood four years ago, she decided to open up shop in the neighborhood. At the storefront and workshop, she and two other staff members craft the bags and customers can get a behind-the-scenes look at the process.

“People can see what it's like, get a hands-on look and talk with the makers,” she said. “That's something you don't often, if ever, come across.”

The bags are designed for people on the go – whether riding or walking.

And Meilinger is a huge advocate of “upcycling”; every bag is made from converting discarded materials such as scrap sailboat awnings, bicycle tubes, and other materials.

“They are materials that can hold up,” she said. “You can use them and abuse them.”

The bags are designed with attributes that make them fully functional while remaining stylish. All of the bags are waterproof, have adjustable straps, and come in a wide range of colors and shades.

Vaya Bags also customizes the messenger bags for customers. From choosing the inside lining to the outside color, adding an additional pocket to fit a specific function, customers can get a bag that fits in with their lifestyle.

“You can always get a bag to fit what you have in mind, we've even done skateboard holders and a cut-out hole for a Chihuahua,” she said.

Vaya Bags produces about three to six hundred bags a year, with most sales during the spring and summer months. The prices range from \$100 to \$120 and customization can go up to \$250, depending on what a customer has in mind.

She has received material donations from local organizations to help produce the bags. Recently, the 14th Street YMCA donated old banners, which she used to line the inside of a few bags. When they're sold, a percentage of the sale will go back to the organization as a thank you.

The small business has been a hit in the neighborhood bordering Queens and Brooklyn.

“People seem to like us here,” Meilinger said.

And she didn't forget her environmental roots. With sustainable, stylish creations, she is adhering to her eco-friendly foundations. She says that she always tries to give back to the environment in any way.

On December 7 at Vaya Store, she will be sponsoring a knitting night where scarves will be donated to the Brooklyn Family Violence Center. Vaya Bags will also take part in upcoming craft fairs; namely, the Bust Craftacular in New York City on December 10 and 11 and at the Brooklyn Craft Central in Park Slope on December 18.

Her messenger bags have been chosen to be featured at the Queens Museum of Art gift shop, in a line of products from Queens-based designers. They will even be featured in the upcoming Columbia Pictures film, Premium Rush, which is due out in Summer 2012.

For more information visit Vayabags.com.