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Dressing up fashion law

Two John Marshall students will hold conference on clothing patents and IP

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Two students at The John Marshall Law School say they want to “put Chicago on the map” for fashion law.

They launched the Fashion Law Society at John Marshall, believed to be “the first such student organization in the Midwest,” said their faculty adviser, professor Doris Estelle Long.

They have also organized a Fashion and Design Law Symposium with 11 speakers, including experts from Canada and Mexico, scheduled on April 12 at the school from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

The two organizers are Michon Stuttley and Natalie Laczek, both in their third year of law school.

Stuttley, 37, from the South Side, said she has been involved in fashion “probably since I could walk” and she dreams about it.

“I actually sleep with a notepad by my bedside just in case I have a business idea,” she said.

Until a year ago, Stuttley had her own clothing store in Bucktown at 2042 N. Damen Ave. She owned the store, known as Ms. Catwalk, for eight years.

She said she also has had seasonal stores at Oakbrook Center in Oak Brook. And she expects to open a store in Hyde Park soon.

She has a dream of “having a mobile clothing boutique, like the food trucks. ... I’m currently shopping for a truck.”

Laczek, 28, from the Clearing neighborhood on the Southwest Side, said Chicago has been considered a flyover city for fashion.

Laczek said their main goal with the 25-member Fashion Law Society was to host a symposium — they “wanted to start with a bang.”

“We have an opportunity here to put Chicago on the map,” Laczek said. Stuttley used the same phrase.

“The students themselves are solely responsible for organizing the one-day symposium,” Long said in an e-mail from London.

Long said it will have the following panel discussions:

- Legal Issues in the Fashion Industry: Creating and Protecting Your Intellectual Property;
- North American Comparative Fashion Law: Policies and Perspectives;
- Advertising Fashion Focus: Designers’ and Lawyers’ Perspective;
- Tariffs, Thimbles and Thread: Customs Law for the Fashion Industry; and
- Walking the Walk: Labor and Employment Issues for the Fashion Industry.

Registration through April 4 is \$20 and can be done at jmls2013fashionlawsymposium.eventbrite.com.

One of the listed speakers is Ashlee Froese of Gilbert’s LLP in Toronto, a lawyer and trademark agent whose practice encompasses trademarks, branding and domain name laws.

Another speaker is professor Roberto Frias of the Law School of the Universidad Iberoamericana in Mexico City.

Another will be from Wilhelmina International Ltd. in New York, a modeling agency. Also among the speakers are several attorneys from Chicago and New York.

“They’re expensing all of their travel and accommodations,” Laczek said. “They’re coming for free, which is amazing.”

Both students say fashion and design law is a growing field.

“Lately, design patents have been

applied for and granted for things like purses,” Laczek said.

Coach Inc., maker of purses and accessories, has been “pursuing court cases all over the world to fight trademark infringement to help protect their brand,” Laczek said.

“What the society is trying to do is bring more awareness to this field of law, because I don’t think people even realize there is fashion law, a specialized area,” Stuttley said.

They are trying to raise awareness, Stuttley said, of copyright and trademark laws, brand licensing, laws regarding textiles “and the ongoing debate over protection” for what Long calls “women’s arts.”

“Fashion law has become an increasing focus of intellectual property law development,” Long said.

“This focus includes increasing demands for new legal regimes in the United States to protect fashion design as well as international efforts to craft new standards for protection.”

“Fashion design covers a wide range of domestic issues,” Long said, and international issues as well — “from the protectionist directives of the European Union to the general lack of protection for fashion design generally in the United States.”

Laczek started a company with her mother called iKnitware. Her mother produces hand-knit scarves and accessories.

“We were featured in the Made In Chicago Store at 16 W. Grand Ave.,” Laczek said, and in Veruca Salt, a store at 520 N. Kingsbury St.

“I would argue that although New York and Los Angeles are very much focal points in the fashion industry,” Laczek said, “in Chicago, we have our own design programs.”

She said these programs are found at Columbia College here, the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and the Illinois Institute of Art — Chicago, 350 N. Orleans St.

“There are a lot of Chicago-based fashion designers,” Laczek said.

Laczek would like some day to build a bridge between fashion law and environmental law based on environmental and sustainability issues in the fashion industry.

Stuttley said for a while she had two clothing stores and was a law student, too.

She said she is also a probation



Doris Estelle Long



Natalie Laczek



Michon Stuttley

officer on a flexible schedule with the Cook County Juvenile Court.

Her father is retired Cook County Circuit Judge Michael W. Stuttley, who in 2010 opened Stuttley Group LLC, a law office in Harvey.

She wants to bring intellectual property law into her father’s firm. “I’m interested in doing cases on fashion, entertainment and sports law,” she said.

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