



# SISTERHOOD, WITH A SQUEEZE

*Reign and Taij's  
Homemade Lemonade  
makes the summer sweet.*

BY RACHEL LINDSLEY

**Y**our average 12- and 14-year olds probably spent their summer at the local pool or summer camp.

Reign and Taij Saunders, though, devoted their time off to growing their lemonade business—squeezing every drop out of each day.

The sister duo grew up in the kitchen helping their mom, Tee, with her baking business, making cakes for events and parties throughout Pennsylvania. One day, inspired by their mom's entrepreneurial spirit, the girls decided to step out on their own with a sweet idea.

"A lot of kids sell lemonade, but they don't take it to the next level. We have a brand, bottle a special recipe and deliver it to our customers at events in the community," Taij said. "We came up with this idea by thinking about what our customers would want in the summertime—fresh-squeezed lemonade."

With an idea in hand, Reign and Taij developed a logo, started promoting their product on social media and signed up for their first local event in September 2019. After the fair, they received their first pre-paid order for one gallon of lemonade. Three years later, the sisters have sold thousands of gallons.

They currently allot at least 10 hours per week to fulfill orders from local businesses such as OD's Fish House and community partners like Millersville University, D.R.E.A.M.S. Minority Business Network and the Dauphin County Library System. Their at-home process takes around two hours per 100 bottles.

"Every flavor of lemonade starts with us juicing fresh lemons," Taij said. "Then, we mix our secret recipe together and conduct a taste test. After, we bottle, label and package each product by hand. Orders are available through curbside pickup or delivery."

As a licensed traveling vendor, the Saunders family participates in vendor fairs throughout Pennsylvania and Virginia. The lemonade line has expanded from four to 12 flavors, including popular varieties like blueberry, mango and strawberry.

Lemonade prices range from \$3 for a single bottle to \$8 for a half gallon and \$12 for a gallon. For repeat customers, the sisters also sell souvenir cups for \$7 with a \$2 lifetime guaranteed refill. New to their menu this summer was "sugarless" lemonade and fruit-infused water—for those watching their



sweets. These are made by special order.

In the next year, Reign and Taij want to take their business on the road.

"We are working on purchasing and wrapping a food truck to show our original logo with a photo of us when we started the business in 2019," Taij said. "This truck will help us take our business to the next level and allow us to provide more offerings at events."

As the sisters return to school this month, they look forward to their school district and teachers supporting their small business and keeping the lemonade orders flowing during the slower winter months.

"Our teachers are so supportive of our business and purchase lemonade throughout the school year to keep us busy," Taij said. "We also like to give to back-to-school fundraisers because, even though we are business owners, we are kids, too."

This August, the Harrisburg community can support the lemonade sisters by purchasing lemonade cups at local events such as at SoMa block party on Aug. 25 at S. 3rd and Market streets in Harrisburg. Reign and Taij's Homemade Lemonade will have a table, selling a variety of lemonades to enjoy.

"We have so much fun working together as a family," Reign said. "We love being out and about at community events and seeing our customers' faces when they try our lemonade for the first time. They often come back for more." **B**

*For more information on Reign and Taij's Homemade Lemonade, visit [www.rntlemonade.bigcartel.com](http://www.rntlemonade.bigcartel.com) or follow them on Instagram @reign\_taijs\_lemonade.*

*Are you a local business wanting to partner with Reign and Taij? Email them at [rntlemonade@gmail.com](mailto:rntlemonade@gmail.com) for bulk, discount ordering.*

*Photos by Rachel Lindsley*





# BROTHERLY BONDING

*Chosen Friends Masonic Lodge provides sense of belonging for Harrisburg men, while caring for the community.*

BY MADDIE GITTENS



Members of Chosen Friends Masonic Lodge No. 43

Clarence Stokes wants to clear up what he sees as a common misconception about freemasonry—it’s not a secret society!

Over the centuries, since its origin, the fraternal organization often has been perceived as mysterious. That’s given outsiders plenty of room to concoct conspiracy theories around the rituals and intentions of the group, some of which you may have heard.

While Stokes acknowledged that, in the past, masons mostly kept to themselves, things are different now, he said.

I can report that I didn’t have to repeat a chant or participate in any rituals in exchange for an interview with some local masons. We just jumped on a Zoom call.

Stokes and Jason Brown were eager to tell me about the masonic organization that they are members of—Chosen Friends Lodge No. 43. It’s a fraternal organization, they said, that has been the opposite of secretive, but present and active in the Harrisburg community.

“The history of this lodge is really the history of Harrisburg,” Brown said. “Our history is not separate from the community; it’s part of it.”

## LEAVING A LEGACY

The lodge’s legacy is deeply tied to Black history in the nation and city. It’s part of the Prince Hall Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania, a branch of freemasonry created by Prince Hall, a man who was one of many African Americans historically excluded from white lodges.

The first Prince Hall Lodge, then called the African Lodge in Boston, received certification as a masonic lodge in 1784. However, when several white lodges in the state joined to form a “Grand Lodge,” it was excluded, according to the book “History of the Most Worshipful Prince Hall Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania.” The Prince Hall Lodge formed its own “Grand Body” and opened lodges in Pennsylvania, Rhode Island and New York.

Chosen Friends got its start in Harrisburg in 1882. Over the years, it became a place for Black men to gather and form a network. From its early days up to today, politicians, lawyers, business owners, pastors, truck drivers, educators and other professionals have joined the ranks.

“It gave men of color some sense of importance amongst themselves,” Brown said. “It was a place of belonging.”

According to Brown, abolitionist and U.S. Colored Troops soldier Jacob Compton was the first Worshipful Master of Chosen Friends. John P. Scott was also a member and grand master of the statewide Prince Hall Lodge. Scott was the Harrisburg School District’s first

Black administrator as a principal, and Scott Elementary School was later named for him.

Other historical figures from the lodge can be found memorialized as part of the Commonwealth Monument, recently installed on the state Capitol grounds. The bronze monument recognizes Black history in Harrisburg and includes a statue of Compton and other activists. Inscribed on it is a list of former residents from the Old Eighth Ward, a majority Black and immigrant neighborhood that was demolished to expand the state Capitol grounds. Several former lodge members are included in the list.

In the present day, the members still represent professions from across the board.

Harrisburg City Council member Westburn Majors has been a member of Chosen Friends Lodge for around seven years. He joined after witnessing his uncle’s experience as a mason and seeing how much the lodge meant to him.

“Guys that I looked up to were part of the lodge,” Majors said. “It was something I was always interested in.”

What Majors found when he joined was a place for fellowship and connection. Majors lost his father in 2008, but, through Chosen Friends, he gained a group of mentors that he could go to for advice and counsel. With them, he often discusses work, faith and family, he said.

“These connections to these guys are invaluable,” Majors said. “There’s a lot that can be learned by sitting and learning from previous generations.”

## FRIENDS FOREVER

It’s not uncommon for Brown’s kids to see their dad talking to a stranger. They’ll ask who it was and Brown always responds the same way—“he’s my brother.” “But you just met him!” they’ll say.

There could be racial, cultural, religious or political differences, but a mason is a mason, and masons are brothers.

“It’s pretty unique,” he said. “You have a friend wherever you go.”

Not only is Chosen Friends a brotherhood, but the lodge has been instrumental in serving the community.

From 1891 to 1982, the lodge ceremoniously laid 16 cornerstones in the construction of buildings in Harrisburg, a traditional practice in masonry that symbolizes stability and strength. All of these buildings were local churches, with the exception of the Camp Curtin YMCA in Uptown Harrisburg.

Community service is what drew Stokes to become a

mason. His mentor, a member of Chosen Friends, was always out in the community helping others.

“I love service and giving back to people that are less fortunate,” Stokes said.

The lodge has participated in holiday giving, adopt-a-highway and adopt-a-school programs. They’ve partnered with organizations like the American Literacy Corporation and the Boys and Girls Club. They’ve also hosted their own events like a daddy-daughter dance and a Thanksgiving meal distribution.

When Chosen Friends members meet in-person, it’s at the Scottish Rite Cathedral in Harrisburg. During the pandemic, events and monthly meetings were scaled back and mostly moved to virtual platforms. But for members like Majors, even the online connection was enough to combat isolation.

At the same time, freemasonry is dealing with another big problem—it’s losing its members. According to an NPR article, in recent years, masonic membership nationally has declined by around 75% from a high of over 4.1 million members in 1959. The decline is part of a national trend away from membership in places like Elks lodges, civic clubs and even the Boy Scouts, among other social, civic and fraternal organizations.

According to Brown, in the 1970s and ‘80s, there were close to 200 members of Chosen Friends. However, in the past several years, the lodge drew around 50 members.

Recruiting younger men has been a challenge, Stokes explained. Members’ ages range from the 30s to 90s, but most fall more in the middle to upper end of the scale.

Stokes, though, was positive about membership at the lodge. He wasn’t worried about its future.

“It has been a challenge with the younger generation,” he said. “But we have withstood the times.”

Brown credits Chosen Friends’ longevity with its ability to leverage connections in the community. This was true for Stokes, Brown and Majors, who all found Chosen Friends through the mentors and role models in their lives. If Harrisburg masons can continue to do that for the next generations, they believe the lodge has a bright future.

“We are an important part of the community,” Stokes said. “We are not just a secret society of men dressed in black suits. We take good men, and we make them better.” **B**

For more information on Chosen Friends Lodge No. 43, visit their Facebook page or email [chosenfriends43@gmail.com](mailto:chosenfriends43@gmail.com).



*Ellen Min (front, center) and members of HAAPI*

## HERITAGE HERALDED

*May event to celebrate, support  
Harrisburg's Asian American,  
Pacific Islander community.*

BY SUSAN RYDER

*"The Atlanta shooting just wrecked me," said Ellen Min.*

As Min sat in the Green Street Little Amps, the March day seemed like any other. People greeted one another as they took their seats in the cozy neighborhood coffee shop. But for the Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) community, it was anything but just another day.

It marked the one-year anniversary of the targeted killings of eight people, including six Asian women, in Atlanta.

Min unfortunately had become accustomed to hatred and violence being directed toward her, her mom and dad, grandparents, aunts and uncles.

Growing up, she experienced eggs, bricks and tomatoes thrown at their house. There was name-calling and a fight at 10 years old because of her Korean appearance. And in the '90s, someone defaced her childhood home with a painting of a swastika and tagged it "gooks."

"I've been told to go home more times than I can count," said Min.



Ellen Min and her children.

During the pandemic, walking with her daughter on Front Street, a group of men yelled that they were the coronavirus and should go home. Her 3-year-old waved back in greeting, misunderstanding and thinking they were saying, “Hi.”

Min described another distressing event.

“My husband and I were at the Farm Show Complex and we were drinking our milkshakes and were in a crowd of people, and somebody stuck their head between us and said, ‘go the f\*\*\* home, you chink,’” she said.

The person disappeared in the crowd before Min’s husband could react.

Even with all of that and more, it was the Atlanta shooting that galvanized Min, who admittedly had bought into the myth of the model minority and, up until that point, had continually told herself, “it’s not that bad.”

“It was like the final culmination, like hatred runs so deep that somebody actually would kill us because of it,” Min said. “That stereotype could kill us.”

Immediately after the shootings, a friend, Tiffany Chang Lawson, called Min.

“I need help,” Min told her. “I need to grieve with someone.”

So, they gathered outside around a fire pit, sobbing about the lives lost, about how they saw their aunts and mothers in the faces of those who died.

That’s also when they realized that they needed a group where they could do this very thing—gather, connect and share. So, the Harrisburg Asian American Pacific Islander (HAAPI) group was formed.

Crawdaddy’s Restaurant and Bayou Bar graciously offered HAAPI a place to meet, even though the restaurant wasn’t actually open. And people came.

One of those people was Joe Lee. At HAAPI’s one-year anniversary celebration with music, drinks and lots of conversation, he said that the group offers “unspoken, implicit understanding of a shared experience.”



HAAPI gathering at Crawdaddy's.

#### BRIGHT LIGHT

Two group members with that shared experience are Virginia Lucy and Amy Zecha, both biracial and navigating two worlds, often feeling like neither racial group welcomes them fully. Because of this, Lucy was anxious about trying out the group.

“It was so much better than I thought it would be—a bright light among so many dark moments,” she said.

Zecha, whose Asian American mother had passed away, craved the connection with other Asian Americans. Lucy described being not Asian enough for Asians and not white enough for whites. But she realized, she said, that, “I’m never going to be Asian enough for everybody. I’m never going to be white enough for everybody, just my best version of myself.”

That evening was the first HAAPI event for Sarah Herr. Joining her Caucasian family through adoption, Herr described feeling a sense of loss. She said that she’s never had an Asian friend or been around those of Asian heritage.

“I’m having a midlife crisis at 23,” she said.

The vivacious young woman also described being harassed for her Asian heritage. Once at the doctor’s office, someone told her “go back to your country for bringing corona over,” she said. She described that and incidents of people trying to “jump her” on State Street in Harrisburg and in Washington, D.C.

“It’s a lot,” she said.

The harassment, along with the shootings and assaults of other Asians, made her anxious and at times afraid to go out.

“It’s times like that, that I wished I had an Asian community of friends that could understand,” Herr said.

That defines HAAPI, a community whose motto is, “Stories not Status.” From the beginning, the rule was not asking people what they did for a living. That provided automatic leveling, making the statement that this isn’t a networking group—it’s a group committed to being there for one another and celebrating their heritage.

HAAPI will celebrate Asian Pacific American Heritage Month with the entire Harrisburg community this month during 3rd in the Burg, over the weekend of May 20 and 21. The event will kick off at the Broad Street Market, with happenings at the Midtown Scholar and Midtown Cinema, emphasizing AAPI contributions, stories and culture. Min hopes that this event can help break down walls and bring understanding of people as individuals rather than as a dehumanizing monolith.

“I love the idea of the celebratory, because you bring together people with food and festivities, but the deeper reason is because...when you understand and get to know culture so deeply, your stereotypes, your prejudice, the discrimination melt away because there’s a humanization and dignifying of the communities,” Min said.

At Crawdaddy’s, the group settled in with drinks and comfortable banter. The feeling of relaxed familiarity permeated the scene.

“This is definitely a community in central PA that we didn’t have,” Lee said. **E**

*The Harrisburg Asian Pacific American Heritage Month celebration takes place May 20 and 21. To learn more about HAAPI and the event, visit Instagram @AAPIHBG or contact HAAPI at HAAPI2021@gmail.com.*

# GETTING THE WORD OUT

*The Black Travel Experience seeks to bring people, dollars to the Harrisburg area.*

BY SUSAN RYDER

In recent years, Harrisburg has seen a burst of new Black-owned businesses and cultural experiences, adding to the already-vibrant scene in the majority-Black city.

The area's destination marketing organization—Visit Hershey & Harrisburg (VHH)—has now created a resource for visitors who want to learn about and patronize these restaurants, shops, cafés and venues, as well as cultural and other events.

“Larger cities across the country really are doing a great job focusing in on cultural experiences,” said Mary Smith, VHH president and CEO. “So, we feel that our region is home to many diverse tourism, businesses, and opportunities. We realize that visitors to the region, they’re demonstrating an increasing interest in learning more about these types of experiences.”

The Black Travel Experience groups opportunities together, much like VHH has done previously with its Sweet Treat Trail for confection fans, its Adventure Trail for outdoor enthusiasts, and its Brew Barons Beer Trail for suds lovers.

The Black Travel Experience seemed like a natural next step in the process.

“Travelers are more savvy,” Smith said. “They’re looking for more than just a list of places to eat or stay or play. They actually are looking to organizations like ours to paint that picture of what they can expect when they visit.”

## AMAZING IDEA

VHH, Smith said, will help people get the most out of their visit to the area. It may also serve as an important resource for local tourists—people who live in central PA and want information on things to do.

VHH is getting the word out through the Black Travel Experience addition to its website, which offers couples and families “must do” options while highlighting Black-owned businesses, shopping, culture and events.

The site introduces visitors to places like the Nyeusi Gallery, which features art created by people of color. It also informs tourists about shops like Eddie’s Men Store and helps familiarize them with long-time Harrisburg restaurants like Crawdaddy’s and newcomers like Good Brotha’s Book Café, purveyor of coffee, sweets, lunch and books.

Café owner Stefan Hawkins likes the idea behind the initiative.

“The word doesn’t get out enough about us [Black-owned businesses],” Hawkins said. “So, amplified voices... that help us to promote and market ourselves... is very essential to growth.”

Sue Kunisky, VHH vice president of operations, concurs. She said that VHH takes the assets of the region and connects travelers to them. To do that, VHH enlisted the help of MaDonna Awotwi, director of communications at the African-American Chamber of Commerce of Central PA. Awotwi assisted VHH in brainstorming, identifying and coordinating with local Black-owned businesses.

“I thought that it was an amazing idea,” Awotwi said. “I thought that it was very inclusive, for them to design a guide with a Black traveler, or people who identify with a Black experience, in mind.”

Why the need for the Black Travel Experience?

First of all, for economics.

“There’s just been so many inspiring stories coming out of Harrisburg about Black-owned businesses opening or expanding, especially in downtown and Midtown,” Smith said. “So, the timing was perfect for us to jump on this.”

Secondly, for convenience—it makes it easier for people to find what they want.

“As a Black person, when you’re traveling to a place you’ve never been before, looking for things that align with who you are, it takes a lot of research and digging on the internet to find the places you’d like to go,” Awotwi said.



Commonwealth Monument on the state Capitol grounds.



And, thirdly, for cultural reasons. Hawkins believes that people should explore Black culture beyond what’s seen on television, pointing out that each city has a unique expression of the culture.

## BRIGHT LIGHT

VHH and business owners hope that this initiative will drive business into the area. Hawkins would like for customers to discover his business. He also thinks that, by highlighting Black-owned businesses, others may be inspired to live their dream of business ownership.

“To take that leap of faith and bet on themselves as an entrepreneur,” Hawkins said.

Awotwi hopes, too, that locals will discover Black-owned businesses. She said that folks have their “go to” restaurants, and she would like Black-owned businesses to be on that list.

“There are some amazing Black-owned restaurants in Harrisburg that deserve to have a bright light shined on them,” Awotwi said.

She mentioned Isabelle’s Southern Cuisine on Reily Street, which serves a to-die-for salmon cheese steak.

Hawkins also frequents Zachary’s BBQ & Soul for its plant-based burger.

Smith said that VHH is looking forward to building upon this initiative, by telling business stories through informational videos and continuing to add businesses as part of the experience.

Also upcoming—state investment in similar initiatives.

In December, the Wolf administration announced that it will spend \$6.8 million on tourism programs that involve diversity, equity and inclusion. “Our work on those started well before we learned anything about the state’s investment,” Smith said. “But it definitely reinforced that we’re on the right track, and that this is an important project, not only at a local level, but at a state level.”

A timely project, the Black Travel Experience gives travelers easily accessible opportunities to enjoy the region in the way they choose.

“Our goal was to be thorough, to truly bring value to both the visitor and to the businesses,” said Kunisky. **E**

Learn more at [visithersheyharrisburg.org](http://visithersheyharrisburg.org).



# BEHIND THE SEAMS

*Harrisburg designers custom make many of the most unforgettable looks at local proms.*

BY MADDIE GITTENS

Jaylene Crawley remembers getting her first American Girl doll at 8 years old as a gift from her mom. It was an expensive purchase for a mother of four kids, but she saved up, and the two squealed with joy when the doll arrived in the mail.

Crawley was into fashion even as a young girl and couldn't wait to dress up her doll. But she knew that her family wouldn't be able to afford extra outfits for it. Instead, she taught herself to sew, picking up tips from her aunt. For hours, Crawley would sew by hand in her room, crafting little dresses for her doll.

She recalls a time when she got caught sewing in class at school. Instead of punishing her, her teacher, Mrs. Cooper, held her after class to give her a sewing machine. "That's what jump-started everything," Crawley said.

These days, she's still making dresses for American girls, but this time they're real-life ones. You might see a few of these young women showing off her work this month, as it is prom season.

Crawley is one of several Harrisburg designers working behind the scenes to make local students stand out in their gowns and tuxes for that special night of the year. Chances are, if you've seen the pictures of bright, flashy, extravagant prom attire, you were looking at the handiwork of one of these local fashion gurus.

## SEW SISTERS

Crawley designed her first prom dress for a client in 2007. For the first few years, she stuck to creating one dress a year for prom. But over the years, that number rose to as high as 21 for a single prom season.

Depending on the gown, it can take anywhere from a few hours to weeks to design and sew a dress. She described herself as a designer as "avant-garde," which "means over-the-top in fashion," she said. Crawley explained her work as wearable art. And there's no better example than her money dress.

"I want to look like a million bucks...literally," a former prom client of Crawley's explained to her.

Fifty-five hours of work and many stacks of fake money later, and the student was walking into her high school prom covered in cash. It didn't take long before the dress went viral online.

"Just to see the girls light up makes my day," Crawley said.



Jaylene Crawley, Kevin Berry, Satin Monroe and Keya Wilson

During the sometimes stressful and taxing season of designing, Crawley is grateful for her support system—her "sew sisters."

A handful of years ago, she met two other Harrisburg designers, Keya Wilson and Satin Monroe. They instantly clicked and, since then, have leaned on each other with encouragement, questions and, when needed, by lending an extra zipper.

"Everyone can succeed, thrive and still help each other," Crawley said. "We don't need competition. No one takes from the other. We all want to see each other do well."

## TUXCEDED EXPECTATIONS

While the "sew sisters" get the ladies ready for prom, Kevin Berry of Covered By Style and Grace is making sure all the guys look just as fly.

"When you dress good, you feel good," Berry said.

While Berry always had a "passion for fashion," as Kanye West, his fashion role model, said, it wasn't until a few years ago, after a job loss, that he could finally make that passion a business.

His style has remained the same over the years. It's sophisticated and elegant, but often with a unique touch. He remembers his own prom experience,



*Tux by Kevin Berry,  
modeled by Issac Brantley*



*Dress by Jaylene Crawley,  
modeled by Faith Johnson*



*Dress by Keya Wilson,  
modeled by Makayla Tumer*

### A MILLION BUCKS

“I’m really picky,” admitted Makayla Tumer, who graduated from Susquehanna Township High School last year.

Prom was something that Tumer thought about since she was a little girl. Once she was in high school, she planned for the big night for over a year.

“I didn’t want a dress that looked like anyone else’s in my school or in the area,” she said. “I wanted to look different.”

When she approached Wilson, who owns Pieces of Me, a design business, Tumer was unsure if Wilson would be able to make her vision come to life. She envisioned a dress adorned with tiny mirror pieces and rhinestones. It wasn’t easy, but what’s Wilson if not the fairy godmother of prom dresses?

“It was the best dress of the prom,” Tumer said, without hesitation.

When you commission Wilson to make a dress, you don’t just get the dress, you get a whole experience. She’s constantly communicating with you during the design and fitting process and will often personally come to your house on prom night to make sure you’re ready to go.

“The best part is, when it’s complete, and you see them dressed up and they’re so happy,” she said. “It’s really rewarding.”

Like Crawley, Wilson is largely self-taught in sewing. What began as a way to make unique clothes for herself grew exponentially once people started asking for custom pieces from her.

Handling the volume of dresses that she works on each year is a challenge—she once sewed her fingers together—but it’s worth it.

“It can be stressful, but I never get tired of it,” she said.

### STITCHING SMILES

While “sew sister” Satin Monroe had training in fashion design, it wasn’t until after she gave birth to her daughter that she really got serious about it. She needed some extra income and decided to sit back down at her sewing machine.

when his dad took him to get his first custom suit in Philadelphia. It was inspired by, of course, Kanye. Berry would still wear that suit, if it fit, he said. It still hangs in his closet—off-white with a bright pop of coral pink.

Now, like his dad did for him, he makes other young men’s fashion aspirations come to life. He’s worked with clients from Bishop McDevitt, Harrisburg High School, Susquehanna Township, Milton Hershey and Lower Dauphin, among other schools.

He has also partnered with the “sew sisters” on prom pop-up shops, and it’s not uncommon for one of his clients to be headed to prom with one of Wilson’s clients. They’ve created a few matching prom looks.

While he hasn’t yet mastered tailoring, Berry designs all the suits and works with local Giovanni’s Tailor Shop.

“If it’s not something I would wear, it’s not something I would give you,” he said.

“My daughter was my inspiration,” she said. “It made me fall back in love with being creative. Taking a chance on myself led me to where I am.”

Now, she designs a minimum of 20 gowns each prom season. She hopes, one day, to design a collection of gowns and to hire some staff members to help with the workload.

There are a lot of hours, thread and sequins that go into prom outfits that turn heads and make the newspapers. There’s also a lot of passion and heart for the clients that the designers are dressing.

While custom designs can be expensive, Berry works to make sure his tuxes and suits are still affordable.

“I want everybody to have the opportunity to dress well,” he said.

Wilson also caters to those who may not be able to afford a custom gown by designing and giving away a free dress to one student each year.

Diamond Thomas, who attended Central Dauphin East High School, was one of these recipients. After Wilson heard of Thomas’ struggle with chronic pain, she decided to give her a special prom experience.

Not only did she make her a custom dress, but she paid for her hair and makeup to be done and came to her house to help her get ready.

“She worked her magic,” Thomas said. “It was a rough year, so it was like a weight lifted off my shoulders. I will forever remember that experience.”

When Wilson and the other designers are stressed, working long nights to get all of their prom orders finished, these reactions keep them going. It’s about more than a gown or tux. It’s the business of making people feel good, making them happy.

“In the end, it’s the smile that keeps me going,” Crawley said. **B**