



Upcycled Fashion Comes to Kent

Justine Gallo, BA '22, has combined her personal philosophy and fashion design degree to launch a new business in downtown Kent.

Sun in Leo is a boutique located in Acorn Alley that reuses—and responsibly sources—clothing, accessories, jewelry and trinkets.

Gallo says the concept of circularity drives the store's business model, which focuses on resource cycles such as reusing, repairing, refurbishing and upcycling to extend the life of products and waste as little as possible.

Sustainable fashion is a fundamental part of Kent State's fashion program, Gallo says, and it inspired her to open her own store. "The more I learned about it, the more I realized that there's so much more that we all could be doing," she says. "But I wanted to be that person to do it."

Everything in the store is responsibly sourced or upcycled by Gallo. She uses seed tags to label all items sold at the shop and attaches the tags with safety pins instead of plastic. Buyers can plant or compost the tags and reuse the safety pins.

Customers also get points at the store by bringing reusable bags when shopping. In addition, they can receive coupons for donating jewelry, apparel and other items they no longer want. Gallo can also repair all Sun in Leo accessories and make any requested alterations.

The name Sun in Leo has a personal connection for Gallo, whose zodiac sign is Leo, also known as the sun sign. She says the store takes a lot of inspiration from astrology in terms of aesthetic and products sold.

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MADE POSSIBLE BY A MICROGRANT

Sun in Leo has been a yearlong journey for Gallo, who applied for and received a LaunchNET microgrant in 2022, during the last semester of her senior year. With the funds she was able to create a LLC (limited liability company), obtain business licenses and permits, and cover other expenses, such as participating in craft fairs.

Gallo is thankful for Tabitha Messmore, assistant director at LaunchNET, who has been her advisor and mentor in the program.

"I feel so grateful that LaunchNET liked and supported my idea for Sun in Leo because it showed me that I could accomplish it," Gallo says. "Tabitha really helped me on the business side of things, which I needed."

Her relationship with LaunchNET continues to provide support for her business, as well as opportunities to help others. "Justine touches base to give us updates or ask questions we can help with," Messmore says. "She is also becoming a great mentor to other students who can use her expertise. I'm extremely proud of all the work she's done to get this far and excited that she's got a great space downtown!"

Sun in Leo, 154 E. Main St. Suite C, celebrated its grand opening on Feb. 4, 2023, with special deals. Gallo wants to plan events and collaborate with other stores in Acorn Alley to create a fun and exciting culture during the spring and summer. ⚡

—Taylor Haydu, senior public relations major from Uniontown, Ohio

Learn more about Kent State's School of Fashion at www.kent.edu/fashion.

Learn more about Sun in Leo at www.instagram.com/shopsuninleo.

