



**Oliver Keller, 5**, of Vineland, shows off his artling and the drawing of his family that it was created from, at the oncology clinic at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia. Karen Lefebvre-Christou, who herself has had a brain tumor, volunteers her time making pillows from drawings by children who go to the hospital for treatment.

**Karen Lefebvre-Christou** (left), owner of art2life, talks with Jacob Sjostedt, 6, of Furlong, as nurse Emily Bisson administers Jacob's chemotherapy.



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View a slideshow and video of Karen Lefebvre-Christou at <http://go.philly.com/image>.



**Kevin Hoffman, 5**, of Jackson, N.J., with his drawing — a really fast black car that he dubs a Mustang — and the artling created from it. Kevin gets weekly chemotherapy for a brain tumor at Children's Hospital.

## An artist's touch

Sick children find comfort in pillows created from their own drawings.

By Lini S. Kadaba  
INQUIRER STAFF WRITER

**K**evin Hoffman zips here, dashes there, a whirling dervish of a 5-year-old.

His vigor, and full head of thick, black hair, belie that he has a brain tumor. On this spring day at the oncology clinic of Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, Kevin, an outpatient from Jackson, N.J., has come for his weekly dose of chemo.

Artist Karen Lefebvre-Christou, a volunteer visiting the floor this day, asks Kevin to draw something that makes him happy. She plans to transform the doodlings into a small pillow. "It's going to be your buddy," she says.

The boy scribbles a cloud of black energy with four wheels in a short second — a car, a really fast, black car that the speedophile declares a Mustang.

Inquirer  
photographs by  
**Sharon Gekoski-Kimmel**

This is Kevin's art. Lefebvre-Christou's mission will be to honor it.

From a studio in the basement of her Melrose Park Colonial, Lefebvre-Christou, 40, is stitching together an unusual business that celebrates children's drawings by re-creating them in the form of 20-inch pillows — a medium somewhat longer lasting than Magic-Marker-on-paper stuck on the family fridge.

Lefebvre-Christou calls the project art2life, and her creations, artlings. The pillows sell for \$125, but for now, she is focused on volunteering her ser-

See **ARTLINGS** on M6

## Old Glory goes out in a blaze. The last rites for broad stripes and white stars

By Ellen Kershner  
FOR THE INQUIRER

**W**ith Independence Day on the horizon, we thought a nice story about flag burning would be in order.

The other kind of flag burning. These aren't flags being doused with kerosene and torched in protest amid angry chants against the government. This is about paying homage to tattered U.S. flags by setting them ablaze in retirement ceremonies — like the one performed on Flag Day, June 14, by veterans at the Leisuretown retirement community in Southampton, N.J.

Don Hetzel, president of the community's Military Veterans Association, acted as master of ceremonies for the ceremony, performed in conjunction with the local Boy Scout Troop 31.

See **FLAGS** on M3



## MIRROR, MIRROR ELIZABETH WELLINGTON

## Pantyhose a fashion 'no' for today's style mavens

**P**antyhose are the difference between dressing like a lady and not — or so my mother says.

Talk about disagreeing. In today's fashion world, wearing flesh-colored hosiery is like choosing a girdle over Spanx — modern-day fashionistas would rather not.

The divide, which has become a hot style topic thanks to a recent Wall Street Journal article about pantyhose in the workplace and a *Good Morning America*

segment, is definitely generational.

Some older women say they just don't feel finished without them. That's understandable. For that generation, wearing pantyhose was the difference between grown woman and little girl.

"I feel uncomfortable if I'm dressed and I don't have them on," said Mary Carberry, 54, of Philadelphia. "My mother drilled into my head that ladies wear pantyhose

See **PANTYHOSE** on M6

### Lisa Scottoline, M2

The words for a commencement speech came, finally, in a flash.

### Suze Orman, M2

Make more money by avoiding these five financial mistakes.

### Craig LaBan, M3

Kaffa Crossing serves some of the best Ethiopian food around.

# Artlings

Continued from M1

ices. In the spring, she worked with the Ronald McDonald House in Camden, and more recently at CHOP, even as she seeks a grant to bring her brand of comfort to more children.

"Their art is so pure," she said of the children's work. "They pick up a pen and just draw."

Slender, with a trendy bob and penchant for a pair of purple satin shoes with velvet bows, Lefebvre-Christou spends five, six hours to get an artling right. "If they put something coming out of their nose," she said, "I'm going to put it in there."

That explains the naked girl riding a horse and the skinny lady with 14 red arms. "I'm not going to try and make it perfect to an adult eye," she said. Lefebvre-Christou understands, perhaps better than many, the basic need children — and especially sick children — have to control a piece of their world.

"I've been in that situation before," she said softly.

When she was 5, she was hospitalized for observation. The suspicion was leukemia. (It wasn't.) Her stay was only a few days, but "it felt like eternity," said the second oldest of four. "As a little kid, I just remember watching my mom and dad and siblings walk away at night. ... I was just standing there, so upset. There was no way I could control my environment."

She clenched her fists at her shoulders — recalling the little girl who felt powerless.

At 12, Lefebvre-Christou was hospitalized again, this time for toxic shock syndrome. Then, the day before her 21st birthday, she faced another medical crisis: surgery for a brain tumor.

She speaks of her illnesses sparingly, reluctant to dredge up that scary time. But those memories are never far. They have driven her to bring art2life to sick children.

"Art, it just feeds you," she said. "Me, anyway. It helps you escape your situation."

If a boy with a tumor or a girl unable to walk "can draw something, maybe it's going to be the monster that scares my cancer away, maybe it's going to be the angel that watches over me. ... I think that's really liberating."

Lefebvre-Christou, a University of Pennsylvania graduate in intercultural communications, grew up sewing at the knee of her mother, Nancy Lefebvre, who taught home-ec before motherhood.

"I'm no art therapist," she said. She isn't claiming she can help the kids work out issues. And she only recently began to think of herself as an artist — ever since her work (including "Queen Mom," based on her own kindergarten drawing of her mom in a purple gown, tiny heels and glittery crown) was exhibited in March at the Please Touch Museum.

But, she has been a patient, prodded and petrified.

So her offer is simple: "an hour of control" and then a "fancy pillow" to keep.

And, in its own way, it is a form of therapy, said Teddy Thomas, executive director of the Ronald McDonald House of Southern New Jersey.

"Any fun activity that takes their mind off the medical care they're actually receiving," Thomas said, "is a wonderful thing for a sick kid."

Art2life was inspired by her cat, Scooby, and son, Alexander, 6.

"This is the first artling," she said,



## an ARTLING is BoRN

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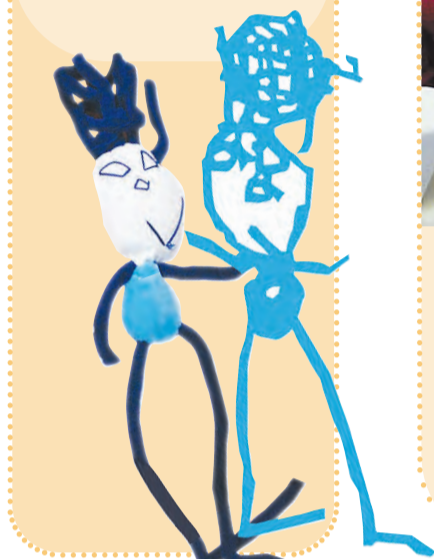


PHOTO ILLUSTRATION



**FIRST** To make an artling, artist Karen Lefebvre-Christou asks Oliver Keller, 5, of Vineland, who has a form of brain cancer, to draw "something that makes you happy." He makes a picture of his whole family: himself; his brother and his parents.



**NEXT** At her basement studio in Melrose Park, Lefebvre-Christou scans the child's picture into her computer and blows up the image to the actual size of the proposed pillow, creating a pattern. That way, she can capture a facial expression, such as the shy smile he drew. For Oliver's artling, Lefebvre-Christou uses a cheerful, bright print for the body, which is stuffed with fiber-fill polyester. Pipe cleaners form the legs and arms, as well as the four spikes of hair, just like in the drawing.



**LAST** The finished objects, which took about six hours to complete, match up perfectly with Oliver's artwork.

holding up "Cat," a pillow she made on a whim as a last-minute Christmas gift for a friend's toddler. The artling represents her then-3-year-old son's first rendering of Scooby — a simple gray outline with a few red lines for whiskers and two red circles (sunglasses, he said) near the eyes.

The animal's body, both on paper and in its 3-D version, is thick and long, like an asymmetrical wine bottle on its side. Four white paws protrude along one edge and red whiskers sprout at the tapered end — as well as those red sunglasses. A small tag includes the original drawing, the child artist's name, and the work's title.

"It's communication," she said. "It's expression. It's just so darling, and it came from my son."

"Cat" was well received. She made a dozen others, this time for her son's preschool teachers. "The parents just went nuts," said Lefebvre-Christou, flanked by a Kenmore sewing machine and bins of scrap fabric, pipe cleaners and shiny trim.

Lefebvre-Christou was encouraged to go into business, and art2life was born in 2006. Early this year, her graphic-designer husband, Christos, helped build a Web site ([www.myart2life.com](http://www.myart2life.com)), where she markets kits and art-themed birthday parties.

The Please Touch showing was her coming-out party. The artlings are "really whimsical," senior exhibit designer Lorna Kent said recently. "They have a real charm."

Three weeks after her first visit, Lefebvre-Christou has returned to CHOP to introduce Kevin and the other children to their pillow buddies.

Oliver Keller, 5, of Vineland, who has a form of brain cancer, had drawn a blue sky, yellow sun and stick figures of his 4-year-old brother, his mother (all pink), his father (all blue), and himself, with four pink spikes of hair, even though his own locks have fallen out from the chemo.

He looked bewildered as he processed this bit of magic, his drawing reproduced exactly, down to his brother's zigzag mouth and his own spikes of pink hair.

"I like all of them," he declared, before he pulled his pillow family close, gathering strength for another round of chemo.

Jacob Sjostedt, 6, of Furlong, also there for chemo, had made a picture of Rebecca, his pet turtle that had died. Two thin blue clouds hovered over the turtle's head. He had told Lefebvre-Christou she must include those.

Of course, she did. "For him to create something — and it to become real — means so much more than buying something in a store," said Jacob's mother, Lanie Sjostedt. Jacob ran off to show his dad Rebecca, with her long winding tail and detachable pipe cleaner clouds.

And Kevin flew his black Mustang through the air, streaks of black pipe cleaners capturing its speed.

"Vroom! Vroom!" he said.

"Just like he drew it," marveled his mother, Maureen. "That's amazing."

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More information about Karen Lefebvre-Christou's art2life program is available at [www.myart2life.com](http://www.myart2life.com).

## MIRROR MIRROR | ELIZABETH WELLINGTON

# Pantyhose

Continued from M1

and I have to do it. Sometimes I don't wear pantyhose under pants."

GenXers have a different take. For them, the polishing is in the visible extras. We'd rather focus on envelope clutch bags, T-strap spectator pumps, or tucks in an airy, white, eyelet shirt-dress. Does wearing pantyhose really matter if you have to squint to see them? They look terrible with open-toed shoes. What's the point?

"Fishnets? Yes. Opaque? Yes. But never pantyhose," said Jae Barnes, 38, who works at Bluemercury, a cosmetics boutique in Center City.

A little lesson in hosiery lingo: Opaque, these days, is synonymous with tights. Pantyhose refers to anything you can see through. The denier, weight and thickness of each thread of nylon denotes its sheerness. Young banker Alex Cael summed it up best as she walked down 17th Street in a particularly cute red skirt-suit wearing, to my surprise, pantyhose.

"Do you think I'd wear them on an 85-degree day by choice?" said the 23-year-old Wachovia employee.

The anti-pantyhose movement doesn't mean our interest in hosiery has fallen to ankle-length proportions.

In fact, according to the NPD Group, a New York-based marketing and analysis company, annual hosiery sales have grown 7 percent over the last two years, from \$6.1 billion to \$6.5 billion.

Of that total, tights sales grew 65 percent from \$258 million to \$426

million in the same two years.

And while sales of sheer stockings rival those of tights, stockings sales fell 7.5 percent from \$1.16 billion in 2007 to \$1.07 billion in 2008.

"We used to stock sheer hose with all kinds of designs," said Mona Lisa Jackson, owner of Coeur, a lingerie and undergarment boutique in Center City. "But nobody comes in asking for stockings anymore. Especially in the summer."

Hosiery has been a key part of women's wardrobes since the turn of the century. Socks gave way to stockings attached to garter belts as long skirts started hitting mid-calf in the 1920s flapper era.

We didn't have pantyhose, howev-

er, until the 1960s, said Sally Kay, president and CEO of the Charlotte-based Hosiery Association. They became a necessity, Kay said, with the invention of the mini-skirt and hot pants.

As women entered the workplace, pantyhose were more of a requirement than lipstick. They put the finishing touches on power suits — from Joan Collins' ultra-shoulder-padded ones in the *Dynasty* era to Calista Flockhart's tiny *Ally McBeal* numbers.

Early this millennium, women stopped trying so hard to dress like men at work. Pink became an acceptable shade, cleavage started to peek out, and bare legs be-

came the norm.

Now as we enter the third consecutive summer of the dress — with this year's emphasis on Empire-waist fitted shifts — we still prefer our legs sans stockings. Even Michelle Obama — wife of Democratic presidential hopeful Barack Obama — publicly decreed pantyhose two weeks ago.

Still, fashion observers hope — and the pantyhose industry hopes — that this fall will mark the beginning of a new era for flesh-toned legwear. Fall fashions, they say, focus on smooth, tailored, belted looks in serious navies and grays.

In fact, Alison Hessert, director of public relations at No Nonsense, predicts a jump in interest in sheer pantyhose in both flesh and colored tones based on their visibility on fall 2008 runways in Karl Lagerfeld and Miu Miu presentations.

Will women voluntarily choose restriction in the name of fashion? Only time will tell.

As it stands now, life without sheer hose is easier, trendier, hipper, and definitely more fashion forward.

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