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Arts: Features

Atomic Energy

Crafty gals and guys descend on the Municipal Auditorium for Atomic 2.0.

By [Cooper Levey-baker](#)

Published 12.05.07

Sarasota had never seen anything like it.

Inside the Sarasota Municipal Auditorium, fashionably outfitted crafters and artisans arranged hand-printed T-shirts on hangers, adjusted brightly colored collage signs and made sure they had enough cash to make change. Outside, in the midday sunlight, a line had formed, maybe 50 deep. Young, eager shoppers milled about, making small talk to kill the minutes before the official opening of the first Atomic Holiday Bazaar.

The alternative craft fair was the brainchild of Adrien Lucas and Cemantha Crain and came about after a visit to the Stitch Fashion Show and Guerilla Craft Bazaar in Austin, Texas, inspired Lucas to do something similar here in town. Vendors hocked bags constructed out of old sweaters, earrings made from reused materials and wallets featuring designs from airplane safety instructions.

This stuff was fresh, young and awesome. And the line snaking down the sidewalk in front of the Municipal Auditorium proved that Sarasota was hungry for it.

Joey Jacco pauses. He thinks for a moment, trying to recall if anything like Atomic had ever happened in town before last December. The bespectacled 23-year-old, who will set up his first-ever booth on Sunday, shakes his head slowly and answers carefully: "Probably not."

If there had been, Jacco would have known about it. He was raised in Sarasota, went to Pine View for high school and then majored in illustration at Ringling College of Art and Design, graduating in 2006.

Nowadays, he pays his bills working at Sarasota News & Books, crafting in his spare time. He began with home-printed illustrated kids' books and already has a pair of titles under his belt: *Caps 'n Cooper* and *Pips 'n Soda*. Both feature animal characters drawn in a simple, colorful style. The books come straight from work Jacco did as an undergrad. Alternative comic artists such as Daniel Clowes inspired Jacco to go to Ringling; when it came time to do his senior project, he wanted to merge the comic style he loved with a focus on kiddies.

He's sold around 10 of each, some through his website, the rest through his proud dad, who talks up the books and buys them as presents. Jacco's profile should be raised considerably by his participation in this year's Atomic, and he's also branched out by learning to sew. He began working by hand, got a sewing machine as a Christmas gift last year and quickly began cranking out plush, fuzzy pillows and stuffed animals, again with a simple, flat-color style.

Like most other part-time alt-crafters, Jacco harbors dreams of making a living off his art. "I don't really have high hopes of that happening anytime soon," he admits, "but maybe, at the very least, it will, somewhere down the line, get me a job." For now, he just needs to crank out more merchandise so he can fill his booth on the Atomic floor.

Heather Sorrells can sympathize. Another 23-year-old Atomic first-timer, Sorrells will bring her vintage-inspired jewelry, accessories and buttons south from St. Petersburg this weekend.

Sorrells grew up in Panama City and moved to the Florida west coast in 2003 to attend Eckerd College. When she began crafting, she didn't intend to turn a profit; her pieces were just for herself and her friends.

She borrows her style from decades past. "I've always been in love with vintage imagery and classic movies," Sorrells says. "Since I was 12, I've been obsessed with classic movies." Her family provides the material; she's found a wealth of images in her grandmother's old magazines. "I'm sort of in love with the '40s and '50s," she says.

Sorrells graduated from Eckerd with a degree in biology earlier this year and has enrolled in the pharmacist program at a University of Florida satellite campus in Seminole. Designing necklaces and bags has kept her sane while studying the hard sciences.

She saw others selling pieces like hers on the alt-crafting networking site [etsy.com](#) and decided to give it a go last December, selling her items under the banner Niphty. Like Jacco, she daydreams about supporting herself with her designs, but crafting is still just a hobby, albeit one that earns her a little cash on the side.

Sorrells missed the inaugural Atomic, but found out about version 2.0 when she started searching for



Cooper Levey-baker
SEW, LIKE, TOTALLY RAD: Atomic vendor Joey Jacco hides behind his hand-sewn pillows and stuffed animals and home-printed kids' books.

INFO

Atomic Holiday Bazaar
Sarasota Municipal Auditorium, 801 N. Tamiami Trail, Sarasota, atomicholidaybazaar.com or myspace.com/atomicholidaybazaar. Sun., Dec. 9, noon-5 p.m. \$5, \$3 for students and kids over 6, free for children 6 and under.

AUDIO

W941: Atomic 2.0
Arts Writer Cooper Levey-Baker talks with Max Linsky about how this weekend's Atomic Holiday Bazaar will top the original.

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