

Fashion merchandiser speaks to AU class

By GINGER CHRIST
T-G Staff Writer

The fashion world is small and first impressions matter, according to Danielle DiBenedetto, founder and designer of Proper Tea — a women's clothing line based in North Olmstead.

DiBenedetto spoke to students in Ashland University professor Nancy Morris' fashion merchandising class Friday.

"You have to come up with something no one has done before or you think no one has done. And, if they have done it, you have to do it better," DiBenedetto said.

DiBenedetto's line is a collection of specialty tee-shirts packaged in oversized tea bags. Each shirt is named after a type of tea.

DiBenedetto started her career as a photographer and

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gallery owner but began her own line to exercise her creativity. An art major from Xavier University, she learned the business side of the industry through the operation of her gallery.

She encouraged students to take as many classes as possible in different subject areas. DiBenedetto took classes in graphic design, marketing and video production, among others, all of which helped her develop the skills necessary to succeed.

"Art history is huge in my

business right now," DiBenedetto said. "You don't realize how much it influences everything you do."

When sketching new designs, DiBenedetto said she will often sit in an art museum or use music as an inspiration. Right now, she is designing her spring collection, which she hopes will be crafted from eco-friendly bamboo fabric.

An important part of the business, she said, is the ability to forecast trends, fashion and colors. DiBenedetto creates all of her pieces and

designs from scratch.

She said taking others' advice is helpful but, ultimately, being true to yourself takes precedence.

"You have to be able to make your own decisions and do what's best for you," DiBenedetto said. "Everything I do has meaning."

Presentation and first impressions are everything, she said. And attitude is key because you never know who you're going to meet, DiBenedetto said.

Morris said the class had been working on developing ideas for the Business Concept Competition this year and that DiBenedetto's speech fit well with the curriculum.

"In the end, if you love it as much as I do, it's worth it," DiBenedetto said.

■ Ginger Christ can be reached at 419-281-0581 ext. 239 or at gchrist@times-gazette.com.