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Laura Skelding AMERICAN-STATESMAN

More than 3,000 ornaments adorn the 25-foot tree set up for A Christmas Affair at the Palmer Events Center. The baubles will be sold for charity Nov. 30 and Dec. 1.

The wardrobe trailer for 'Friday Night Lights' — an 18-wheeler with mirrored doors on the back — is more or less a clotheshorse's dream: a gigantic walk-in closet. Professional stylists and costumers buzz around the long racks of clothes, which are sectioned off by character. On this day, the trailer is stationed in the Northeast

Austin church parking lot that serves as one of the base camps for the NBC show, which is filming its second season in and around the city.

One thing, though. These aren't exactly the most fashion-forward clothes. The show, set in fictional Dillon, has won national acclaim for its small-town authenticity, which is reflected in everything from the characters' homes and cars to their wardrobe.

"That's one of the most challenging aspects of our job — not to make people look too hip," costume supervisor Jaimey Sloan says. "Sometimes it's hard to find stuff that looks like they bought it in Dillon, Texas. But at the same time, we have actresses from L.A. who know what's in style. It's hard to find that balance."

Kathy Kiatta, a friendly but hurried woman in jeans and Western boots, is among those moving about the trailer. As costume designer, she oversees every

character's look, from the principals to those who appear just a few times.

"It's much faster than shooting films," says Kiatta, who has spent most of her career on movies, including "Miss Congeniality" and "What's Eating Gilbert Grape," both filmed in Austin. Today, with input from Sloan, she's mapping out looks for the next episode.

After Kiatta and crew read the script and break it down into how many costume changes each character will need, they sift through the character's "closet" — basically, his or her section of the long racks — and select the right pieces. To help keep it all straight, every outfit for every scene is logged into the "breakdown

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NBC PHOTOS

Brian 'Smash' Williams (Gaius Charles), left, likes to look sharp while Tim Riggins (Taylor Kitsch) sports well-worn clothes.

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LIGHTS: Style must fit the characters on NBC show

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book." Each garment also gets a tag that details which scenes and episodes it has appeared in, to avoid having a character wear something two days in a row.

While Kiatta and Sloan think about tomorrow, costume supervisor Taylor Rierden has the current episode on her mind. It's her role to make sure the actors are in the right clothes at the right time. That means pulling together the planned elements for each outfit — clothing, shoes, jewelry and other accessories, not to mention undergarments — and bundling the whole ensemble in plastic to be ferried to the set. Because of the fast-paced shooting schedule, actors do all their changes on set, so Rierden has to be on the ball. Usually everything goes fine, she says, but one time ...

"There was a tie that went missing," she recalls. "We had to find a double — and it was vintage. We made it in time to match it and then they cut the scene. Turned out the actor found it in his notebook two weeks later."

Costuming, then, is a challenging job — but fun, too, of course. One of Kiatta's favorite parts is dressing Brian "Smash" Williams, the Dillon Panthers' cocky running back, played by Gaius Charles.

"I have so much fun shopping for this guy," she says, waving a hand over his rack of jewel-toned, fine-spun button-downs. They decided that Smash, a ladies man with a job at the Alamo Freeze, spends his extra money on clothes. "I get a lot of colorful stuff from (Neiman Marcus) Last Call."

Surveying another character's rack, she shakes her head.

"Poor Matt Saracen is not spending his money on clothes."

With a sick grandma to worry about and a father in Iraq, Saracen (Zach Gilford), the Panthers' first-string quarterback, doesn't have the means for sartorial spiffiness.

Each character has a specific style. For Lyla Garrity (Minka Kelly), the cheerleader turned evangelical, the look is classic, Kiatta says, with a lot of solids. Tami Taylor (Connie Britton), the coach's wife, gets a similar but more mature look, while the wardrobe of daughter Julie Taylor (Aimee Teegarden) is "colorful, patterned, wacky," Kiatta says. Tyra Collette (Adrienne Palicki), the bad girl who's really not, favors darker colors.

"All the girls are like dressing Barbie dolls because they've got knockout bodies," Kiatta says.

Finding clothes for the guys is trickier. Kiatta echoes a complaint not new to many in the Austin fashion community.

"There's no place for the men. As far as being an individual, that's where the thrift stores and



Deborah Lykins photos FOR AMERICAN STATESMAN
Costume designer Kathy Kiatta, left, and costume supervisor Jaimey Sloan examine a shirt for the 'Friday Night Lights' character Tyra at Blue Elephant. The store is a show favorite.



NBC
Tami Taylor (Connie Britton) holds her new baby, Gracie. The baby is played by triplets and a doll. The show buys four sets of each outfit, which allows any baby to be ready to shoot.



Buffalo Exchange come in," she says.

To get the worn-in look favored by characters such as Saracen and bad boy Tim Riggins (Taylor Kitsch), the Panthers' fullback, Kiatta trolls New Bohemia, a vintage store, and Big Rig clothing (housed in an old school bus) for vintage T-shirts and Western shirts. She often wears out the clothing even further with sandpaper and bleach or rubs Soft Scrub on the collars for a sweat-stained effect. And the collars on vintage Western shirts frequently get cut down.

"They film really close-up, so you don't want it to be distracting," Kiatta explains.

Another concern is T-shirt art. On older shirts, it can be tricky to get permission from the artist to use his or her work. This became such an issue that Kiatta commissioned recent University of Texas graduate Ellie Closuit to draw a couple of designs. These went onto T-shirts for Landry Clarke, Saracen's geeky sidekick played by Jesse Plemons.

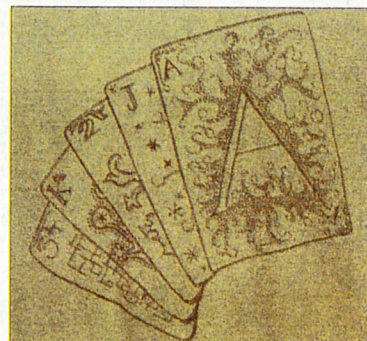
Kiatta works with local company Longhorn Promotions in creating the royal blue Dillon

Panthers T-shirts that nearly every character owns. She even ordered a couple worn-out T-shirts with vintage-looking Panther logos for Riggins, whose father played Panther football in his own high school days.

And speaking of Riggins, we later bump into Kelly Nelson, who's in charge of the hair styling. "Taylor's hair," she divulges about Kitsch, "as greasy as it's supposed to look, it's all conditioner." Any other scoop? "Well, Minka is naturally a blonde," she says about Kelly. "But she's so much more exotic as a brunette."

A few days later, Kiatta and Sloan go shopping for the female characters. The two usually hit the stores every day or two, frequenting a mix of local places and bigger stores: Blue Elephant, By George, Pangaea Trading Co., Estilo, Lotus Boutique, Barneys Co-op, J. Crew and Free People, along with the thrift stores.

The first stop on this excursion is Pangaea Trading Co., an imports shop that also boasts a good selection of fun, not-too-trendy apparel. The women breeze quickly through the store. "Do you



Kiatta buys two sets of each piece of jewelry, including these rings, top, for Julie. Pieces get damaged easily on the set. She also commissions T-shirt designs, such as this one by local artist Ellie Closuit.

'Friday Night Lights'

8 p.m. Fridays; NBC, KXAN Channel 36

think the artwork would be OK?" Kiatta asks Sloan, nodding at a purple Indian-motif shirt. She decides to pass on it. As they move through the rest of the racks, the women occasionally turn to each other, "Lyla? Julie? Noel?" They pile items on the counter — a chunky gray sweater for Lyla, a casual gray and purple hoodie for Noel (a character who'll debut later this season), and, for Julie, a couple of off-white waffle-weave shirts, which Kiatta plans to dye green.

On the mannequin, Kiatta spots a necklace made of silver circles. "Let's get that," she says, already moving on to a bowl full of chunky plastic rings. She picks the turquoise and yellow ones, selecting two of each. "Jewelry is tricky because we have to buy two of everything," she says. "We can do some fast damage."

There's no arguing about the fast part. They're out of the store in 15 minutes and on to Lotus Boutique, and then Blue Elephant. There, Kiatta flips through the small selection of baby clothing, but comes up with nothing. Gracie, the Taylors' baby, is played by 9-month-old triplets — and a doll — so it's necessary to get four of every outfit. "A lot of the kids' stuff we get online," Kiatta says. "Otherwise it's a constant scramble for people to try to order it for you."

Constant scramble seems to be the nature of the job. "I would love to be bored," Kiatta said at one point during the shopping trip. Now it looks like she'll get her wish. With the Writers' Guild of America on strike since last week, the show will cease production indefinitely early next month unless something changes.