

THE BUSINESS OF COSPLAY: PRETTY PRINCESS HQ

While other cosplayers may volunteer to appear at charity events in costume, Laura Schubkegel has made her hobby a business. Two to three times a month, performers from her Pretty Princess HQ appear in costume as Disney-inspired fairy tale princesses at birthday parties, parades and other activities for children.

Schubkegel has 10 performers ages 16 to 26 on her roster, including her sisters Gretchen and Meredith and former university theater students. Pretty Princess HQ offers several packages for events, from the \$100 "Sparkle" storytime with a princess to the \$220 "Be Our Guest" package, which has a princess performer sit for "tea time" with the party attendees.

"You dress up as a character and people trust you," Schubkegel says.

The Pretty Princess HQ performers style their clothing and hair to look like the characters from the Disney movies. Their costumes are purchased online, and they use makeup and wear their hair to look like the familiar Disney princesses, including some of the newer princesses like Jasmine from *Aladdin* and *Moana*.

But Schubkegel says they they're not legally allowed to claim they're supported by Disney. Depending on the company that owns the original characters, cosplayers can be viewed as "free advertising" or become the subject of cease-and-desist letters asking them to stop dressing like the characters. It's a legally gray area, and courts have not determined whether a cosplayer's costume counts as copyright infringement. But few companies are willing to sue cosplayers simply because they're fans of the company's movies or comic books.



Courtesy

Schubkegel says her solution is to make sure Pretty Princess HQ avoids claiming it's connected to Disney in any way and to stay in the Kalamazoo area.

"I would be flattered if they did know about me," she says of Disney.

Schubkegel says the idea of turning her hobby into a business came when she was making volunteer appearances in costume as a princess and was approached by several parents looking for a princess to attend their child's upcoming event. In 2017, the business's first year, the company had enough bookings to keep the princesses busy throughout the year.

For more info, visit prettyprincesshq.com.

From left, Alysia Cook (Snow Queen), Jennifer Smargiasso (Beauty) and Laura Schubkegel (Cinderella) are just three of nearly 10 princesses that perform and entertain children, as seen in top right photo, through Pretty Princess HQ.



Brian Powers