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Ready for the prom? Non-profit organization ensures a perfect fit

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Judy Mathew can take one look at a girl and pick out the perfect prom dress for her.

Price is no object. After all, she's selecting from Becca's Closet, a nonprofit organization that collects and distributes prom dresses to girls who can't afford to buy one.

The McEachern High School chapter has about 700 dresses in stock —just in time for the start of the local prom season in early March.

"Sometimes, girls come in thinking since it's donations, it won't be up-to-date or fashionable," said Mathew, a McEachern senior. "It's not going to be old hand-me-downs.

"These are really cute dresses!"

Mathew said she makes a mental note of the dresses as they go into the inventory, then matches them with girls based on their skin tone and hair color.

"It's kind of like having a personal shopper," said Emily Petway, the McEachern faculty advisor who founded the Powder Springs club four years ago.

Becca's Closet began in memory of Rebecca "Becca" Kirtman, a high school girl who created a dress bank. After Kirtman died in a 2003 car accident at age 16, her friends and family took up her cause.

Petway, an assistant band director at McEachern, learned about the organization on a nightly news show. She also felt that financial hardship shouldn't stand between a girl and her prom.

McEachern is one of 75 Becca's Closet chapters across the country and one of only two in the state. The other is in LaGrange.

"The prom is one of the biggest rites of passage for a high school student," Petway said. "There's a sense of regret if students don't go. If they're trying to decide between paying the power bill and going to prom, that's a decision students shouldn't make."

Petway said a student from Walton High School has shown interest in starting a third chapter in Georgia, but the school has not yet found a teacher to sponsor the club.

"We're crossing our fingers," Petway said.

The McEachern club, which has 15 active members, has given out about 150 dresses to prom-goers. It also places out-dated dresses with the drama club for productions such as "Footloose," where 1980s dresses are in vogue.

"If people are going to give us their gowns, we want to make sure they go to a good home," Petway said.

Becca's Closet never turns down a dress.

"We had someone come in with a dress from the 1940s," Petway said. "I said, 'No one's ever going to pick this dress.' It's now considered vintage. It's a hot item."

More than 200 of the dresses on the racks are brand new. Prom USA in Douglasville recently donated more than \$56,000 in dresses, shoes and accessories.

"We distribute year-round," Petway said. "There are always events happening: ROTC cadet balls, homecoming, prom, Sadie Hawkins dances, scholarship pageants. If they can't afford a dress, they can come to us."

Becca's Closet held a fashion show in late February at Town Center at Cobb mall to show off some of this year's dresses.

Throughout March, the club will occupy a store donated by AlphaGraphics at 2965 Ring Road for fittings by appointment only.

Petway said volunteers are needed for dress alterations and dry cleaning. The group also needs plus-size dress donations and extended length dress racks.

Mathew's prom on April 19 will be her third formal dance.

She's donated her previous two prom dresses to Becca's Closet and would like to start a new chapter of the organization when she gets to college.

"We get to help girls our own age who have issues," Mathew said. "You actually kind of bond with them when they come in to get a prom dress. We're like their best friends —at that moment, at least."

## BECCA'S CLOSET

**Appointments:** E-mail [mhsbeccascloset@yahoo.com](mailto:mhsbeccascloset@yahoo.com). There's no financial criteria to meet.

**Fittings by appointment:** March 1-31 at 2965 Ring Road NW., Kennesaw, GA 30144.

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