



Organizations, events, retailers share interest in economical homecoming wear

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These days it's not just the cost of a dress for the homecoming dance that has parents dreading the dent the big event will make in their pocketbook.

Once you add up the cost of shoes, jewelry, a purse, and a trip to the hairdresser, the final tally can reach hundreds of dollars.

Whether you are trying to save money or just cannot afford a formal dress, there are several options available in the tri-cities.

In Bay County, young women looking for an affordable homecoming or prom dress can visit Becca's Closet.

Becca's Closet is a national program that was started in Florida by Rebecca Kirtman when she was a freshman in high school. She launched a dress bank providing dresses and formal accessories for high school girls wanting to go to homecoming or prom, but not being able to afford it.

Becca was killed in a 2003 car accident when she was 17, but her family and friends continued the program and today there are dozens of chapters nationwide. The United Way of Bay County oversees Becca's Closet and it is the only chapter in Michigan.

Teens participating in the United Way's Students United - its youth volunteer organization - donate their time to run Becca's Closet, said Cindy Miller, Volunteer Resource Director for the United Way of Bay County.

There are two girls each from six Bay County high schools who have volunteered to help with the program, Miller said.

Girls who are interested in seeing one of the dresses in Becca's Closet can call a local family that is coordinating the program to make an appointment, Miller said, adding that all the dresses are stored at Do-All, Inc. and ARC of Bay County, who donated the use of their facilities.

"It's a really neat program," Miller said. "The girls feel so good to see someone get a dress that couldn't afford to buy one on their own."

There are about 500 dresses available in Becca's Closet and anyone who wants to donate a dress can call the United Way of Bay County. In addition, the program accepts donations of jewelry, shoes and other

accessories.

Amy Neering is the mother who oversees the program and coordinates the student volunteers. Her daughter, Alicia, who is now 20, volunteered for it a few years ago and now younger sister, Katie, is following in her sister's footsteps.

Both her daughters have enjoyed the experience of seeing someone find a dress who otherwise could not afford one, she said.

"The kids get so excited when they come in and get all dressed up," Neering said.

To make an appointment to see one of the dresses in Becca's Closet, contact the Neerings at (989) 892-2497.

Resale and vintage options available

Other options for girls wanting to get a formal dress for less are resale or vintage clothing shops. In Midland, What Goes Around Comes Around, 3128 Jefferson, Suite 2, is a resale shop that carries several formal dresses.

In Saginaw, visitors to the Glad Rags Resale Shop, 1309 Court, should have no difficulty finding something unique. Owner Mary Bush travels widely finding all types of dresses from the short black cocktail dress to the full-length glamorous gown. She also carries many evening bags, shoes and jewelry.

In March, NextMedia Group offered an event called "My Girlfriend's Closet." NextMedia is the parent company of Saginaw radio stations WGER-FM, 106.3; WSGW-AM, 790; WTKQ-FM, 100.5; WCEN-FM, 94.5; and WTLZ-FM, 107. The radio group and cosponsor Roth Cleaners of Bay City hosted the event at Center Courts in Saginaw Township.

If you brought a formal dress to the event you could exchange it for something different, said Wendy Zolinski, an account representative for NextMedia.

In addition, there were other clothing items for sale at reduced costs and hundreds of bridal gowns for sale as low as \$25, Zolinski added.

"This past spring was our first time so you never know what to expect, but it was a neat way to do kind things for others," she said.

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