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# Becca's Closet makes prom dress dreams come true

March 26, 2009

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Sixteen-year-old Mariel D'Andrea has enough prom dresses to outfit well over a hundred girls.

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That's right — the Father Ryan High School sophomore has a bonus room in her Franklin home full of taffeta and silk and satin formal dresses in just about every size, color and style.

And if you're a girl who needs one, all you have to do is ask.

Mariel is certainly NOT hoarding the gowns for herself. Rather, she is the organizer for a group known as **Becca's Closet**, whose mission it is to collect new and gently used prom dresses and give them away to girls who want to go to their proms but can't afford the luxury of buying a dress.

"My mom read about it in the paper, and my family is very service involved and so she contacted the girl who was doing it (Caroline Dickens) to see if we could help," said Mariel, an articulate and energetic girl who talks easily and enthusiastically about her dress project.

It was not until more than a year later that they heard back from Caroline, who was graduating from high school and was ready to turn her Becca's Closet over to Mariel, who was just an eighth-grader at the time.

"She had a foundation and gave us the dresses that she still had, and we started building," said Mariel. The network has grown so much that

not a week goes by that Mariel and her mom, Jo Ann, don't have appointments with people on the giving and receiving end of this wonderful formula.



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Mary Hance's Ms. Cheap columns appear on Thursdays, Saturdays and Sundays. She is the author of Ms. Cheap's Guide to Getting More for Less.

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The D'Andreas enjoy both sides of the Becca equation — the people who bring the dresses ("It's awesome to hear the stories," Mariel says) and the grateful girls who take the precious dresses home with them.

"My mom and I try to make it fun. Some of the girls have never seen a dress like this. They have been asked to the prom but don't have the money to do it. It's really fun when they send us pictures of themselves (at the prom) in the dress."

The giveaway works on the honor system, with no questions asked and no expectations for what ultimately happens with the dress, Mariel says. But she admitted that she was a teeny bit miffed when a mother/daughter duo arrived in a super expensive car and unabashedly took a dress.

"But you can't say anything because that's not the way it works," she said. "It is for anybody" who says they need a dress.

Clearly the mission is to help girls who honestly "need" a dress. The ideal situation occurs when a girl takes a dress and wears it to her prom and returns it to Mariel for someone else to enjoy. "But they don't have to. There are no rules," she said.

"We have just about every size from itty bitty zero up to 20-22," says Mariel, who says some of the most coveted dresses have been the assortment of beautiful designer gowns donated by some of the Titans cheerleaders.

If you have dresses to donate, or if you need a dress for your prom or other occasion, e-mail Mariel and her mother at [gownsforgirls@comcast.net](mailto:gownsforgirls@comcast.net) or call 790-7433.

What a wonderful project — I know it's a lot of work. But if you meet Mariel, you can't help but know it's truly her labor of love.

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