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Girls in need dance the night away at school proms, thanks to Brockton area groups that provide dresses.



Marc Vasconcellos/The Enterprise

By Kelly Onanian
ENTERPRISE CORRESPONDENT
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WHITMAN — When Cori Forbes overheard another student say she couldn't go to the prom because she couldn't pay for a dress, Forbes stepped right in.

"I went over, told her to give me a call and let me know when she was available to come over to Becca's Closet and pick out a dress," said Forbes, a Whitman-Hanson High School student. "She gave me 12 hugs and seven million thank-you's.

Forbes, 17, is the coordinator of the Whitman Chapter of Becca's Closet, one of several local organizations providing free dresses for girls who would otherwise miss their prom because they cannot afford the clothes.

Similar local groups include the Fairy Godmother Project in Taunton, the Plymouth chapter of Becca's Closet and the Wareham-based Fairy Godmothers of WomenAde.

"This project takes the burden off families," said Denise Hebert of Taunton, co-founder of the Fairy Godmother Project, noting that prom dresses can cost \$400 to \$500.

The Whitman-based Becca's Closet is an all-volunteer, nonprofit organization created in memory of 16-year-old

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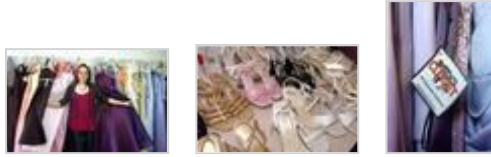
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Cori Forbes, 17, of Hanson, a junior at Whitman-Hanson Regional High School, is the coordinator for the Whitman chapter of Becca's Closet, one of several local organizations providing free prom dresses for girls who would otherwise miss their prom because they cannot afford one.

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Closet in 2006, hoping to teach her teen daughters, Caroline and Adrianna, the importance of helping others.

She was able to set up a "closet" inside The Cleanist dry-cleaning shop at 53 Long Pond Road thanks to the generosity of owner Paul Ceccarelli and general manager David Grippi.

The dry-cleaning chain has five other stores where dress and accessory donations are accepted. It also offers free alterations and cleaning service.

Garret said the cost of a dress plus accessories, hairdo's, makeup and limo service, can push prom costs sky-high.

"If you add it up, sometimes kids spend \$1,000, which is way out of proportion. Prom is supposed to be about being with friends, dancing and memories, not so much pressure on what a girl is wearing," Garrett said.

She said three stores have donated several brand-new gowns, some costing more than \$600. They include Hillary's and Maria's of Italy in Plymouth and Brides By the Bay in Falmouth.

"When a woman comes in with her daughter and you can tell they need a gown, the moms almost always hug you because their daughter is walking out with a dress they absolutely love," she said.

Carver High School guidance counselor Kimberly Duane said the Peer Helpers group at her school has put on prom dress drives to help gather dresses for Becca's Closet in Plymouth. The school also reaches out to girls whose families have limited incomes to get them the assistance.

"I think it's a wonderful program that also allows the girls some anonymity," Duane said.

Rebecca Kirtman, of Davie, Fla., who died in a car accident in 2003. Before her death, Kirtman launched a prom-dress drive at her school, single-handedly collecting 250 dresses for needy girls. Today, there are 82 active chapters nationwide, including in Whitman and Plymouth.

The Becca's Closet Whitman chapter is located inside the Whitman Academy of Performing Arts, which has more than 300 donated dresses on display, including shoes and accessories.

"It's really heartwarming to see someone so happy about getting a dress because everyone should be able to go to their prom," said Forbes.

Denise Hebert of Taunton, co-founder of the Fairy Godmother Project, has helped thousands of girls over the last 10 years feel like the "belle of the ball" at their prom in trendy, upscale dresses donated by the public and local businesses.

Last month, she hosted a "Princess Boutique" at Holy Rosary Parish Center in Taunton, where girls from Plymouth and Bristol counties were paired with a volunteer "fairy godmother" to help search through 2,500 dresses and accessories.

"Every year's getting bigger," Hebert said.

Maureen Garrett started the Plymouth chapter of Becca's

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Wareham's Old Company Store owner Shari Aussant recently put on a prom dress drive to benefit WomenAde of Wareham, a non-profit organization that helps Wareham's needy. It was the first time she held the event, at which they collected more than 400 dresses.

"The way the community came together to help these girls out was unbelievable. We also received gift certificates from local businesses to help with prom-related expenses," Aussant said.

The drive sparked the creation of the group, the Fairy Godmothers at WomenAde.

On April 30, from 6 to 8:30 p.m., The Fairy Godmothers of WomenAde will host an event called Cinderella's Dream at Wareham High School, where girls can check out the gowns and accessories.

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how can a person donate prom dresses? i have several in a closet that my girls wore a few years back and would love to help support this cause.

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