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## No girl without a prom dress

### Gainesville Prom Closet hosts its third annual prom dress giveaway on Saturday

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Getting ready for the prom takes a lot of effort and money - prom tickets, limousine rental, boutonniere, hair and makeup. And for girls, it's all about the dress.

Gainesville Prom Closet aims to help by hosting its third annual prom dress giveaway this Saturday. The event will be from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the Gainesville Boys & Girls Club, 2700 N.W. 51st St., near Buchholz High School.

Ashley Poser Wipke and Deanna McVay started Gainesville Prom Closet three years ago to help girls who want the perfect prom dress but may not be able to afford one.

"Prom's always a fun experience," Wipke said. "I don't think being limited by funds should deter anyone from going to prom."

Wipke said they expect to have more than 300 dresses this year. Gently used dresses, which Wipke stores in her single-car garage, are donated by members of the community between December and the week of the event.



*Doug Finger/The Gainesville Sun*

Ashley Poser Wipke organizes dresses at her northwest Gainesville home Wednesday, March 3, 2010. Wipke runs a non-profit organization called Gainesville Prom Closet, which collects hundreds of gently-used short and long formal dresses to donate to less fortunate teenage girls in the area.

Wipke said the number of donations has continued to increase. Dresses come in all shapes, sizes and ages. Wipke said they have gotten a few ruffle dresses from the 1980s, which she says some of the girls love.

Wipke's favorite part of the event is helping girls try on dresses and seeing the looks on their faces when they find the perfect gown. The girls usually come with their parents or bring a friend to help them in their search for their dream gown, Wipke said.

In addition to free dresses, Gainesville Prom Closet is also offering prom-related raffle prizes.

Shoppers at the events will have a chance to win dinner for two at Stonewood Grill & Tavern or Mildred's Big City Food, a free hair appointment with A Nu Twist and a tan from LAE Tanning and boutique.

There will also be a chance to win a boutonniere and corsage from Floral Expressions and Plant Shoppe, local florists.

Gainesville Prom Closet is hosting the event in conjunction with Becca's Closet, for the second year.

Becca's Closet is also a nonprofit organization that provides dresses to girls in need. The organization was started to commemorate Rebecca Kirtman, who died in a car accident in 2003.

Prior to her death, Kirtman started a prom dress giveaway at Nova High School in Davie. Her parents, Pam and Jay Kirtman, started Becca's Closet after her death and it has become a national organization.

Seventy-five girls found their prom dress through the joint event last year, and Wipke said she hopes to see more girls attend this year.

She said she does not want anyone to miss the event because they feel bad about not being able to afford a prom dress.

"Dress shopping is an open and fun experience, and that's how we try to make it for them," she said.

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