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## Nonprofit turns girls into princesses for a night



Mothers and daughters watch the other girls try on prom dresses while awaiting their turns at Becca's Closet in the Festival Flea Market Mall in Pompano Beach. (Eric Bojanowski, FPG / May 14, 2010)

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High schools are in the midst of end-of-the-year festivities, and for some students it is an endless calendar of dollar signs. Money for senior trip, money for graduation and, most important for senior girls, money for prom.

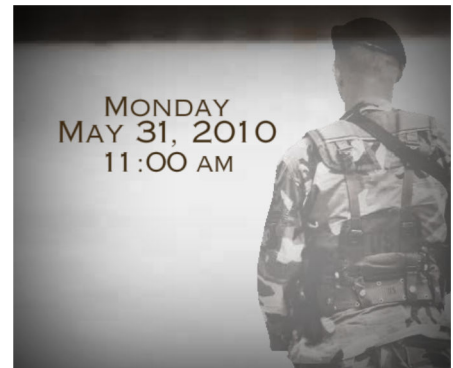
For underprivileged girls in the area, the dollar signs might not be feasible, and neither is attending prom.

Knowing that not all girls could afford to buy prom dresses, in 2002 Rebecca Kirtman started the Nova Dress Bank at Nova High School, where she was a freshman. She urged girls to donate their old prom dresses, wrote letters to manufacturers and went to the mall to talk to dress stores.

The following year, Rebecca was killed in a car accident, but her legacy lived on with the dress bank,


which was renamed Becca's Closet in her honor.

"Rebecca loved parties, she loved people, she loved clothes; she loved everything about anything that was social," said Jay Kirtman, Rebecca's father and chairman of Becca's Closet.



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Since the nonprofit began, it has spread beyond the storage bays of Plantation and across the country, with roughly 85 chapters in 32 states. Kirtman said he believes Becca's Closet has handled more than 75,000 donated dresses in that time.

Locally, the Festival Flea Market in Pompano Beach is where girls go by appointment to get dresses. Volunteers are on hand to help girls find the perfect dress. This prom season, up to 2,500 have been given to girls.

C'zariah Lambert, a senior at Deerfield Beach High School, picked out an aqua-colored gown with a corset-style top for her prom last Saturday.

"It's my senior year, and I was kind of struggling trying to pay for other things for senior year, and I kind of couldn't afford it," Lambert said.

She said that she usually has a difficult time finding a dress that fits her perfectly, but the volunteers were patient and helped her go through a few dresses until she found one. Lambert's favorite color is purple, and she imagined her senior prom dress to be that color. Although she wasn't sold on the aqua dress at first, when she tried it on again at home, she remembers thinking, "That's my dress."

That realization of finding the perfect dress is what makes volunteering for Becca's Closet worth it to Ariel Kendall.

"You know when they find the dress – the smile on their face is so priceless, they show their moms," she said. "Some moms come to you crying."

Kendall, a senior at Pinecrest Academy, has been involved with the nonprofit since her freshman year of high school. She is now the president of the Junior National Board, a group of teens that helps come up with fundraising ideas for Becca's Closet. Every weekend, she also helps girls find their gowns and accessories for different formal events. When she goes to college at [George Washington University](#) in Washington, D.C., she plans to start a local Becca's Closet chapter there.

Not only have people donated dresses, a couple came by a few weekends ago and donated 25 boxes of hair accessories, Kendall said. Also, some beauty schools have given out gift certificates for girls to get their hair done at the salon.

Kirtman said dress manufacturers have also been very generous and have donated dresses that usually sell for more than \$1,000.

"For me, it's sending a message to these children: it's more than the dress, it's showing them that people care and especially that Rebecca cared," Kirtman said. "Little things can make a big difference to someone. It's the fact that she cared to do something."

Students who can't afford to buy a gown for a formal occasion can visit [beccascloset.org](#) or call 954-424-9999. Since Becca's Closet goes by the honor code, it only asks that students bring a valid student ID card.

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