

# The Miami Herald

Posted on Sat, May. 09, 2009

## Teens planning prom on the cheap

BY HANNAH SAMPSON

[hsampson@MiamiHerald.com](mailto:hsampson@MiamiHerald.com)

Prom season, that time of gowns and tuxedos, limousines and after-parties, arrives this year in the midst of economic crisis.

But few teens -- or schools -- seem willing to make the party that caps off a student's high school experience a casualty of the recession.

Instead of indulging in as much excess as they might have in the past, many teens say they are cutting corners, searching for bargains and spending less cash in other parts of their life.

"I think people realize that prom is an only once-in-your-life type thing. It's something that everybody has to do," said David Argov, a senior at J.P. Taravella High in Coral Springs. "They can cut other expenses such as not going to the movies as much or not going out to eat as much so they can go to prom."

David, 18, Taravella's senior class president, spoke about savings as he picked up his rental tuxedo at Men's Wearhouse. It would have cost him \$170, but he took advantage of a promotional deal where each friend he referred got a \$20 discount and knocked 10 percent off his bill.

"If I got 10 people, which I did -- which is awesome -- I got a free tux," David said.

At his school, like most, the senior class has been raising money throughout high school for prom, which costs \$130 a person, including senior dues. Taravella also participated in an online competition that rallies students to vote for their own school and made \$5,000 for the prom, which took place Friday at the Westin Diplomat in Hollywood.

At Miami High, students held fundraisers throughout their junior year to keep the cost of prom tickets down. The result: \$40 tickets for those who raised money and \$55 for those who didn't.

"This is such a rite of passage," said Barbara Quintero, activities director at Miami Senior High. "We strive to make sure every student can participate."

Prom is scheduled for May 30 at Signature Gardens in Miami. The school will make free tickets available for students who would miss out for financial reasons, she added.

While some kids are renting limos, she said, some are borrowing their parents' car -- or just getting dropped off and picked up.

Quintero said the school has put up fliers of acceptable clothing for prom, which includes tuxedos and lower-priced suits. Staff members have donated dresses and the school refers students to Becca's Closet.

## **DONATED DRESSES**

Becca's Closet, a charity that provides free donated formal dresses to girls who couldn't otherwise afford them, has seen the number of teens seeking prom gowns nearly double over last year.

Jay Kirtman, co-chairman of the organization, said students are turning to them because their families have found themselves in financial turmoil and have to worry about money for college or other expenses instead of a gown.

"We're seeing a lot of people that traditionally would never be in that situation," he said.

The organization, founded by Kirtman's daughter Rebecca before her death in a 2003 car accident at age 16, opened early for prom this year. They started working with girls the weekend of Valentine's Day at the Festival Flea Market Mall in Pompano Beach. Those who need a dress can still make an appointment at [www.beccascloset.org](http://www.beccascloset.org).

Kids from all over -- from Vero Beach to the Florida Keys -- have been coming this season for dresses. Some are gently used, and others are brand new, donated by dress companies.

"This is something that they've looked forward to, a lot of these kids, their entire lives," Kirtman said.

## **CUTTING BACK TRENDY**

Teens across the country are looking for ways to cut spending so they can focus on the most important parts of prom like the dress, makeup and hair, said Ann Shoket, editor-in-chief of Seventeen magazine.

In a survey by Seventeen and the Hearst Teen Network, 65 percent of girls said they weren't cutting back on prom spending.

The magazine's prom issue suggested girls consider whether they really need a limo and corsage, and included stories about do-it-yourself boutonnieres and where to find a dress for the right price.

"It's a real teaching moment for teens to talk about financial responsibility in a way," Shoket said. "How do you still get what you want and still get what you need and still have something that you love and not break the bank?"

For 18-year-old Kori Lopez, a senior at Dr. Michael M. Krop High, that something was her dress, which she found at Ross.

"It's beautiful and it's super inexpensive," she said of the \$60 champagne-colored dress.

She's also reusing the shoes she wore for homecoming.

"They're almost brand new. I only wore them that night," she said.

Kori said a lot of her fellow students are pitching in for gas and carpooling, and others are renting cars instead of limos. And they are scrimping on non-prom spending, she said.

"People are totally saving up for prom," she said.

Fellow Krop senior Melissa Wedderburn, 18, said it's difficult for teens who want the whole experience: the limo, the after-party, the *dress* for the after-party.

### **`REALLY TOUGH'**

"It's been really tough for the most part," Melissa said. "People really do have limits on everything they want to buy."

Gersie Arnold, Krop's activities director, said students at the North Miami-Dade school have been fundraising for all four years, selling candy, pom-poms, shirts, hoodies and other items.

Prom tickets are \$85 for the big night, May 30, at the Signature Grand in Davie.

Arnold said the school's PTSA has collected dresses for students who need them and helps out with tickets for students who can't pay.

Teri M. Kaye, a certified public accountant and mom of Micole, a Cooper City High School sophomore, says she has definitely seen economy-related changes in prom preparations this year.

"The bottom line," Kaye said, "is these kids are very aware of the economy and they're measuring their prom dreams against what makes the most sense."

Miami Herald staff writer James H. Burnett III contributed to this report.