

Find your dream prom dress - free!

BY JENNIFER COE Staff Writer, Reminder News



Anyone who remembers getting ready for the prom, male or female, remembers the preparation it took. Besides finding a willing date, rides, tux's, flowers and dresses all have to be obtained. These days, in the dim financial climate many families find themselves, buying an expensive dress that will be worn for one night might seem like an impossibility and an extravagance. A local organization has made prom dresses their sole mission.

Princess & the Prom is a Connecticut organization created to provide free prom dresses to any area high school girl who might not otherwise be able to afford one. "It is our goal that every girl has the opportunity to feel like a princess on the night of her prom," it says on their Web site, and they mean it.

Founded in 2007 by mother and daughter Cheryle and Lauren Podgorski, the program has helped almost 1,000 girls get a free prom dress so far, and guess what? They are coming back at the end of the month to give away even more dresses.

But, honestly, it's not just dresses that Princess and the Prom is giving away; it's pure happiness.

Another mom and daughter know all about that. Lisa Chase and daughter Alyssa had a prom dress to buy last year for Alyssa's boyfriend's senior prom. As Lisa put it in an email she sent to Princess and the Prom the day after their visit, "the last six months has been financially tough for our family, and buying a \$200- \$300 prom dress was certainly not on my agenda." But Chase realized that at the same time, it was very important to her daughter. "When a girlfriend told me about this event," she said, "my daughter and I became excited, made our plans and left our home to arrive at the hotel on Sunday at approximately 8:45 a.m." Chase credits her daughter, Alyssa for being willing to check it out. "I was very fortunate that she was willing," she said.

The event itself impressed these ladies even more. "There were so many dresses to pick from," said Alyssa who chose a black and white stunner. "All the girls were so happy and excited." Mom thought it was great too. "It was so cool to see so many people from so many backgrounds get together," she said. "These girls were a group of young ladies who were beyond excited to go preview dresses that were donated. They did not care that they were "slightly worn." They did not care where it came from, or how much it cost. All these girls cared about was finding a dress that they liked, they could fit into and feeling good about themselves," said Lisa. "It was wonderful to witness."

"Prom is such a special event in every girl's life...it's the highlight of the high school memories. It has become so expensive, that we wanted to help make it affordable for everyone," said organizer Cheryle Podgorski. "It's extremely rewarding to see a girl get the dress of her dreams and know that she will look beautiful at prom." Podgorski and her daughter had read about a similar organization in San Francisco. "It started out as a high school service project for her - she was a junior at Granby High. We gathered 5 other Granby mother/ daughter teams and started the project," said Podgorski. "The girls are all off to college now, but we have continued the program, as the need is even greater than ever to help girls get to prom."

Alyssa will be going back again this year to find another fancy dress. She is going to her junior prom and wants to look like a princess. Lisa, her mom, is actually volunteering at the event, she was so taken with their mission and the giving spirit she found at last year's event.

Cheryle says that the group is still in need of dresses and accessory donations as well as volunteers. To donate, or to pre-register to "shop" for a dress make sure to go to the Web site to get all the instructions, www.princessandtheprom.org. Pre-registration is required .

This event is Friday, March 26 - Sunday, March 28, at the Hilton Garden Inn on Day Hill Road in Windsor.