

the SOURCE

Charity helps girls dress to impress

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One of the surprising outcomes of this tough economic climate is the good it has brought out in people by inspiring them to find ways to help others weather the storm. A great example is Hope Closet, a charity organization dedicated to helping high school girls get a dress and accessories for their prom, despite financial constraints.

Hope Closet's latest collection drive is happening now, and The New You Body Wraps & Wellness Center in Utica is offering its location as a drop-off place for donations of "After 5" attire and accessories. Located at 8801 Hall Road in the Heritage Square Plaza, The New You will collect donations until March 31, and anyone who donates an item will get a \$15 coupon to use toward its services.

"This is a great cause and during these economic times it becomes more important for us to support our community," said Helen McCormick, a reflexologist at The New You.

Since its inception in 2004, Hope Closet has provided thousands of dresses to young women who work hard in school and deserve a special outfit to wear on their big night. The program is open to high school girls in the entire metro Detroit area, and girls from as far as 150 miles away have participated. Any student interested in taking part in the program must show a valid school ID, transcript or other proof of enrollment to qualify.

While Hope Closet does not guarantee that every girl will find a dress that works for her, it does its best to try. Thanks to the generosity of the local community, Hope Closet was able to distribute more than 480 dresses and accessories for students attending the prom last year alone, and representatives hope this year will be an even greater success.

With the "spring cleaning" season just around the corner, metro Detroit women are asked to go through their closets for any gently used "After 5" attire of all sizes, including bridesmaids gowns, prom dresses or accessories (jewelry, shoes, purses, hosiery, wraps and gloves) that can be used to help a girl attend her special event in style.

For those who may have no dresses or accessories to donate, Hope Closet also accepts donations of dry cleaning services, financial support, rolling dress racks, plastic garment/dress bags, printing services and shopping bags. Storage facilities and transportation services (to store the donations, and to

get the dresses to and from drop-off sites) are also needed.

After collecting and cleaning the donated dresses, Hope Closet holds a “spring boutique” where girls can come in by appointment only, and “shop” for a dress and accessories with the help of a volunteer personal shopper. The phone number for making an appointment will be posted at www.hopecloset.com in early April. This year’s boutique will occur April 25 through May 2 at the Royal Oak First United Methodist Church, 320 W. Seventh St., in Royal Oak.

The process of setting up the boutique is interesting as literally an entire temporary dress store is set up in about a 12-hour timeframe, including dressing rooms, three-way mirrors, dress racks and tables showcasing approximately 1,000 accessories. The results, however, go far beyond just providing a dress for a special event.

“One of the many rewards in dealing with these young ladies is in giving them the opportunity to meet and interact with volunteers who are good role models, and to let them enjoy a little one-on-one attention,” said Emily Baker, vice president of Hope Closet. “It gives a great message to these students to witness how valuable they are when approximately 250 volunteers show up for them. Hopefully this will inspire the students in turn to ‘pay it forward’ by giving back to their community in the future.”

Given the current economy, everyone is feeling the pinch in one way or another, but it is times like these when the spirit of generosity shines.

“To see the look on the girls’ faces when they receive a great dress means so much,” said Whitney Drake, president of Hope Closet. “It is inspiring to know that, despite all the bad news we’ve been hearing around the Detroit area, that so many people want to give back to help someone else. We’re a very giving community.”

Those interested in volunteering at Hope Closet’s spring boutique can e-mail the organization at hopecloset@yahoo.com. For additional information about the drop-off location at The New You Body Wraps & Wellness Center, call 323-0355.

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