

Organizing the Prom Closet



ALEX LEWIS

Lauren McDonald sits in a pile of prom dresses at her house on Feb. 28. Lauren has been collecting since November and, so far, she has 115 dresses that she'll be putting on sale right before the prom for girls who can't afford full-price dresses.

By REGAN PALMER

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COLUMBIA — With the high price of a prom dress, hair and nail appointments, and going out to dinner, a prom night can be quite costly. However, Rock Bridge High School senior Lauren McDonald, 17, is trying to make the night more affordable for high school students in Columbia.

McDonald decided to collect prom dresses to give away to high school girls at a Prom Closet this spring. She is also taking donations for gift certificates for restaurants as well as hair and nail salon gift certificates, which will be raffled on the day of the Prom Closet. The girls will be able to pick out and try on the dress of their choice.

If you go

What

Prom Closet

When

From 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. April 12

Where

Broadway Business Park, on West Broadway past Fairview Road by Shakespeare's and Hy-Vee Hyvee.

To donate

Dresses can be dropped off at the activities office at Rock Bridge High School, 4303 S. Providence Road.

The idea for the Prom Closet began in November when McDonald and her mother were thinking of a community service project she could lead for a scholarship.

"I was talking to my mom, and I knew I wanted to do something that would influence girls my age," McDonald said.

When McDonald overheard classmates talking about how they had to pay for all of their prom expenses, she said she couldn't imagine what it would be like if she were in that position. McDonald described prom as being a night every girl should experience and recalled her mother telling stories about her prom night.

"It's supposed to be a fun thing all girls should be able to go to," McDonald said.

With an initial goal of collecting 50 dresses, McDonald has now gathered 115 dresses, as well as several gift certificates. So far, she has five gift certificates for restaurants, four for nail salons and four for hair salons.

"At first my goal was 50 dresses. Then I thought if I could get to 100 that would be awesome," McDonald said. "Now I have over 100."

The Gown House donated 33 dresses to the cause. Owner Sandra Sanders said she saw a newspaper article about the Prom Closet and knew she was in a position to help.

"Sometimes when you give, you receive also," Sanders said. "That was my way of giving."

The Prom Closet is a wonderful concept, Sanders said. "There's a lot of beautiful dresses that only get worn once," she said. "If they are able to help out someone else, I think it's very worthy."

To add to the cause, McDonald is asking for optional donations to the Rainbow House, an emergency children's shelter. The Rainbow House also provides programs such as a regional child advocacy center, a family advocate program, counseling and a Sol House transitional living program.

“We wanted to do something intertwined with women and children to go along with the feminine theme of the Prom Closet,” McDonald said.

Ron Graves, Rainbow House director of development, said the recognition is welcome. “It makes us feel humbled to know we have a reputation in the community for people to take the time to organize something like this,” Graves said.

Although McDonald is excited about how successful the dress collection has been so far, she doesn’t think she will realize the impact until the sale.

“Seeing the girls wearing the dresses will be fun,” she said.

McDonald will graduate high school this year and plans to go to Missouri Valley College in Marshall, but she hopes the Prom Closet project will continue next year. She is passing the responsibility onto two sophomores who would like to continue it.

The Prom Closet will be held on April 12 at Broadway Business Park on West Broadway. If you would like to donate a dress, you can drop it off at the activities office at Rock Bridge High School.