

Boutique for those in need of a prom dress

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Appleby College's Prom Project is trying to reach local youths who want to go to their prom.

Particularly those who may be finding it tough to find the right dress or suit — that is, one they can afford.

A group of five Appleby College female students, and teacher Melissa Fernandes, are out to ensure every teen in town has the chance to be part of the rite of passage.

To that end, they want to hear from any local youth who may find financial obstacles in their path.

Those they do hear from will be able to attend a gala boutique being hosted at Appleby at which they will be able to choose a free prom dress or suit on Saturday, April 17 from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. (for girls) and Saturday, April 24 from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. (for guys).

Interested students need only RSVP to mfernandes@appleby.on.ca or leave a voicemail at 905-845-9641, ext. 342 — leaving a first name only and indicating if they will be bringing a guest along.

"At the event, students must flash their student cards to prove they are enrolled in high school," said Fernandes.

"Light appetizers and refreshments will be served. A seamstress and a few volunteers will be on site and all confidentiality will be maintained at the exclusive event, students need not provide their last name, their school or any other information," said Fernandes.

Hundreds of donations have been made since the Prom Project was launched last fall — from ever-so-gently-used to brand-new donations, which were handed over by Oakville's own By Tocca and Mainstream, two downtown Oakville business that have, together, donated more than \$25,000 worth of dresses and accessories.

Dresses and suits are available on a first-come, first-served basis.

According to Fernandes, word of the project in the community drew a great response.

While donations have poured in, the Prom Project organizers say they can accommodate lots of students and so they want to hear from them.

"I am still not hearing from the youths in the community who are in need and who could greatly benefit from the project. This is the most important part, to actually reach those who need a hand," said Fernandes.

At what the Prom Project organizers are calling the gala boutique to be held in Appleby College's lounge, there will not only be clothes to choose from, but also advice on all the glitz, from makeup, to hair and more.

The group of Appleby students took on the project and did cold-calling, dropped off flyers, solicited donations from friends, neighbours, the community, teachers and more.



Boutique for those in need of a prom dress. FUN FOR ALL: Clockwise from left, Appleby College's Alex Berin, 16, Laura De'ath, 18, Nikki Kipp, 16, and teacher Melissa Fernandes organize the dresses donated for the Prom Project. With lots of dresses — and suits for guys — in hand, the group wants to hear from local youths who may be struggling with the effort to attend the prom. *Nikki Wesley / Oakville Beaver*

The group contacted local agencies like Big Brothers Big Sisters of Halton and the Halton Children's Aid Society (CAS) to get the word out to those who may need assistance.

They also developed a website, secured a storage area in an Appleby residence and planned the hors d'oeuvres-and-refreshments gala boutique to be held this month.

The gala boutique, for those who may be shy of attending, will offer an upscale ambiance at which the Appleby students will become the personal shoppers, advisors and confidantes of those arriving for personal, one-on-one assistance in getting glitized up for prom night.

The idea was that of Fernandes, a business and global issues teacher in Appleby's social sciences program.

The group of students at the heart of the Prom Project include Nikki Kipp and Alex Beran, both Senior I students, and Laura De'ath, Alex Henderson and Ashley Thistlewaite, all Seniors II students.

Fernandes said the idea was born last summer when she read about Toronto's Corsage Project. Other similar efforts are The Princess Project in California and The Cinderella Project in Vancouver.

"I saw the need for an organization that would help all high school students attend prom with confidence," said Fernandes.

Invitees to the gala boutique will be graduating students, male and female, in the Halton region who have either requested an invite on the project's website, or whom have been referred through local agencies including school principals.

Fernandes said those who may need assistance not only for proms, but also for apparel for job interviews, confirmations — even for the parents of youths to attend such functions — are welcome to contact her.

For more information, visit www.thepromproject.webs.com.

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