

Closet: ‘This is about giving girls the opportunity to level the playing field’

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But Pike also remembers friends who lent her dresses to make sure she could attend dances when she went to Warrenton High School.

“It was a feeling of acceptance ... the feeling of being included,” she said. “They didn’t want me to miss out on something like that. We still wanted to do things together, but if you didn’t have a dress you couldn’t go — just like Cinderella. I just remember feeling like somebody cared enough.”

So on Saturday, it was especially meaningful for Pike, a stylist for Allure Salon, to be able to help girls getting ready for Warrenton and Seaside proms through Cinderella’s Closet. The program, run by the Assistance League of the Columbia Pacific, lends prom and homecoming dresses to students who may not otherwise be able to afford the attire.

About 30 students on the North Coast took advantage this year of the stockpile of shoes, accessories and more than 600 donated dresses.

The hope is to make everyone “feel like a princess” at prom, said Seana Fields, the program’s newly named chairwoman.



Seana Fields delivers prom dresses to Cinderella’s Closet in Warrenton.

Photos by Colin Murphey/The Astorian

“Going to dances is expensive. This is about giving girls the opportunity to level the playing field,” she said.

This year, the program worked with four local salons to give students a free hair and makeup session.

“We thought, ‘How could we make it more special?’” Fields said.

When Pike heard about the opportunity, she knew she had to get involved.

“I just wanted to give back to a young girl like

myself who couldn’t drive to Portland and try on a bunch of dresses,” she said.

Adding a free salon day is part of Fields’ overall goal to expand Cinderella’s Closet and revitalize its image. For several years, the Assistance League has seen participation lag.

In the past, the league has struggled to get the word out through schools, as well as battled the perception the donated dresses are too out of style or only for girls with single-digit dress sizes.

Fields hopes to change that by doing a fundraiser so the program can have its own money and flexibility to buy a variety of dresses each year.

Fields joked that she has already started studying by scrolling through everyone’s prom photos on Facebook.

She also wants to include boys by accepting donations for items like dress slacks and shirts.

“Yes, (dances) are frivolous and fun. But it’s another



Maranda Blecha, left, works on Hannah Jones’ makeup before the Warrenton High School prom.

layer of what it’s like to be in high school,” Fields said. “I want to see people feeling comfortable and happy, and I think it’s important to give people the opportunity if it’s there. These things aren’t necessities, so it’s nice to not add additional burden to families.”

For Janessa Bork, a freshman at Warrenton High School, the idea of getting all dolled up in makeup and a fancy dress for prom made her a little nervous.

“I wasn’t sure how I’d like it on me,” she said.

Buying an expensive dress for one night seemed financially unrealistic for her family. Her initial local shopping trip to find a dress

in her budget wasunfruitful.

So when Bork saw a flyer for Cinderella’s Closet, she decided to give it a try.

“I think it’s great,” June Bork, her mother, said while watching her daughter’s hair get curled. “Dresses are expensive, and we couldn’t find anything here. Her friends would have been doing her hair instead if it weren’t for this.”

Now she has a red, strapless ballgown to look forward to on prom night. About halfway through her hair appointment, it was clear Janessa Bork’s nervousness had faded.

“I’m getting more excited about it,” she said, smiling into the salon mirror.

Little: ‘Your livelihood relies on people trusting you by knowing you’

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For the past two years, he has attempted to recruit a successor so he could train them on the job, but so far has had little luck.

“There just seems to be less of an interest,” he said.

There could be many reasons, Little said. Clatsop County’s population is too small to support a full-time, independent child abuse evaluation center, so the work Little and others

do at the Lighthouse is on an on-call basis, and often on top of other jobs.

It’s not an uncommon model for rural communities. Places like the county jail, where Little also works, nursing homes and other entities all require ad-hoc doctors to perform on-call functions.

Traditionally, many of these roles have been filled by doctors in private practice, Little said. While the North Coast is seeing more doctors

likely than ever before, fewer and fewer are going into private practice due to growing economic pressures.

Little also believes part of the issue could be a change in culture within the medical community. The demands of medical practice are greater, meaning fewer feel they can carve out time for another job.

Medical practice is also seen more as an 9-to-5 job, he said, with more doctors moving from opportunity

rather than settling down and committing to one community for years.

“(In private practice), your livelihood relies on people trusting you by knowing you,” he said. “There’s an economic imperative to build your practice up, and you build your practice up by being in the community.”

“Small-town life is built on everybody pitching in and helping everybody,” Little continued. “As a small-town doctor, you come in with a

certain mindset.”

If his position at the Lighthouse can’t be filled, Little said, the medical piece would have to be outsourced to a regional center in Portland.

But sometimes, when a family is in economic and emotional turmoil, the difference between a 15-mile drive and a 100-mile drive can be the difference between whether a child abuse case is fully pursued.

“It’s hard enough to take

time off work,” he said. “We want to make this as barrier-free as possible when it’s needed.”

He hopes someone will step forward.

“We’re not going to stop child abuse by having the Lighthouse,” Little said. “But if we can find out what has happened to kids or what’s not happened to kids, we can better help the families, and maybe make a difference in the outcome of that child’s life.”

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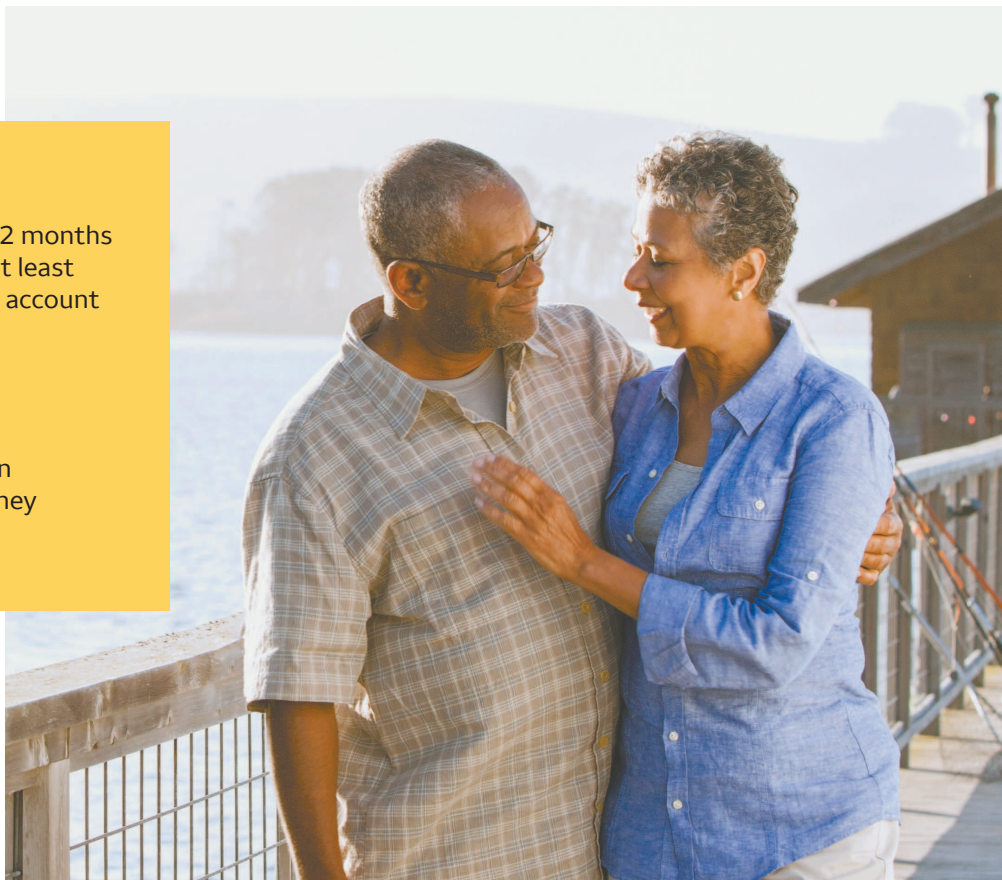
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