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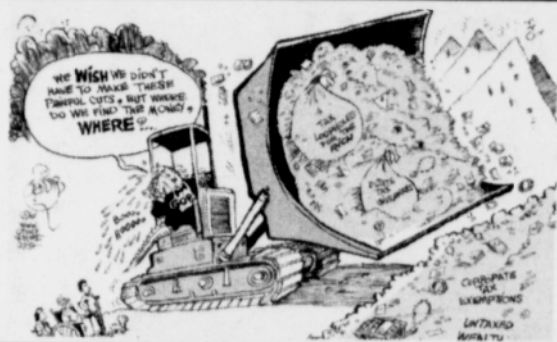
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What's on your list today?

LOCAL NEWS



PHOTO BY CARI HACHMANN/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Madeline Polak, a senior at Lakeridge High School and a member of the Student Advisory Board for Abby's Closet, tries on a royal blue, donated dress for the camera.

Prom Gowns All Around

Donated dresses make dreams come true

BY CARI HACHMANN
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Prom in the modern era is no simple affair. For many young men and women, the graduation party is a pinnacle event of their high school teen lives and a chance to live a night of luxury with celebrity-worthy dresses and tuxes, fancy dinners, party limos, paparazzi, live bands, hotel rooms, and the list goes on.

For young ladies, expectations for prom are set high, and the price tag to look pretty is even steeper.

First, a girl needs the perfect gown and shoes to match. Don't forget manicures, pedicures, hairdos, jewelry, and flowers. Then if you're getting more serious, add fake tans, brow waxing, teeth whitening, and a professional photographer to capture all of these wonderfully expensive moments.

What ends up being a one-night, spring affair of dressing up and going out turns out to be a thousand-dollar expenditure, which for some parents looks like drained wallets and dipping into savings.

For the seventh consecutive

year, Portland non-profit Abby's Closet offers a financial hand to hundreds of dreaming-of-prom teens and parents by giving away free, donated prom dresses.

Thousands of high school women from all over Oregon and Washington this month flocked to the Doubletree Hotel's Lloyd Center Exhibition Hall, where supported by hundreds of volunteers, Abby's Closet held their two-day 7th Annual Prom Gown Giveaway.

"Each year the numbers of young women who attend our two-day event increases," said Sally Eglund, founder and president of Abby's Closet. "This year, Abby's Closet made our greatest impact yet by providing free gowns to 2,200 high school women."

With 7,273 beautiful donated dresses to choose from, all varying in size, shape, and color, each entering high school student took a number and waited their chance to search through racks of glimmering options.

Once called, girls hunted for the ideal prom dress and with the help of friends, mothers, siblings, and all the volunteers wearing bright pink shirts, including on-site seamstresses, each walked away with a free, dream gown.

"The event provides an encouraging community for high school

woman to feel confident as they select their dream dress," said Eglund.

This year, for the first time, Abby's Closet conducted the "Dreams Can Come True" contest to honor a young woman who embodies the spirit and mission of the organization, which is "to inspire confidence and respect in high school women by providing free formal gowns for prom and other memorable events".

Maria Martell, a senior at Glencoe High School in Hillsboro was announced the winner after careful reviewing of the applications.

"The selection committee was so impressed with Maria," said Eglund. "She is a well-deserving young woman who has worked hard academically and personally to set and achieve her dreams".

As the winner, Martell was allowed to choose the first gown of the year from the Abby's Closet event. She also received gift certificates and other prizes to help her look and feel confident on her prom night and a monetary award to be used for higher education.

Abby's Closet, run entirely by volunteers, has been helping prom dreams come true since 2004 when the non-profit organization was co-founded by Eglund, her daughter

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