



PRESS RELEASE

Dresses for Dreams Drive Promises Gowns to Needy

The Fundraiser's Founder Aims To Break Last Year's Donation By Collecting 125 Dresses

March 3, 2006

By Maria Laverghetta

Alligator Writer

In the spring, shops and stores bloomed with starry-eyed high school girls trying to find the perfect dress for the perfect night.

Unfortunately, the dress racks remained out of reach for some girls - until now.

A green Cache dress glinted in the sunlight as Ashley Wheeler pulled donated dresses from all over Gainesville out of her navy blue Chevy Blazer.

Her fundraiser, "Dresses for Dreams," inspired local department stores, consignment shops and residents to give up their treasured prom dresses, which spent years in hiding, to underprivileged girls, who could make them shine again.

"I don't want girls to feel underprivileged," Wheeler said. "I want them to feel like people are looking out for them."

Wheeler started the fundraiser in 2005. A high school student who was given a dress last year came to her mind. The girl threw her arms around Wheeler and said she was so thankful.

"That day, no matter how poor you are or how you were brought up, that day, you can be rich," Wheeler said.

This year, after already receiving 75 dresses, Wheeler hopes to give away 125 dresses - more than six times the amount donated last year.

Local businesses have come forward to offer dresses of all shapes and sizes.

The most expensive dresses are between \$300 and \$400, one of which was donated by Wheeler's sister, she said.

A seamstress has even come forward to patch up the dresses free of charge, Wheeler said.

"If people do all this for prom dresses, then they will do something more substantial for something else," she said.

Wheeler has worked for her second cousin-in-law, Sandy Thompson, at Sandy's Consignment Boutique on 13th Street since she was 12.

Thompson has owned her consignment shop since she was 19. She said Wheeler's energy, work ethic and generosity were always inspiring.

"She always wanted to help everybody," Thompson said. "She's just one of those do-gooders."

Thompson's daughter, Mandy, was always tired of hearing that she should be more like Wheeler. She would tell Thompson that normal people don't work like Wheeler does, Thompson said.

Wheeler said she hopes to go into health administration, where she wants to be able to help people.

The idea for donating dresses is just a small part of what Wheeler wants to do in the world, but she hopes that it helps, she said.

"I wanted to make every girl's dream come true one dress at a time," Wheeler said.



Florida | **Campus Compact**

Media Contact:

Justin Cross, Public Relations Assistant

Email: justin@floridacompact.org

Phone: (850) 488-7782