

Annual Prom Dress Drive giveaways coming to Santa Cruz County

Thousands of evening wear pieces sorted and 'refreshed' Monday

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Santa Cruz >> Pamela Whittington hopes the perfect flowing, bedazzled prom dress can give local teenagers one of many memories they will treasure for a lifetime.

The Classic Vapor Cleaners owner and co-organizer for the 6th annual Prom Dress Drive received deliveries of new and gently used dresses from collection points around the county at her Water Street store Monday. The dresses were in store for an afternoon of "sorting and sizing and freshening up" before being distributed to three pop-up boutiques scheduled for the coming two weekends.

In difficult times, the giveaway has offered young women a little something extra come prom time, organizers said. In fact, usually a few thousand something extras.



Monte Vista Christian High student Sarah Holthouse and her mother Cynthia drop off two armloads of prom dresses Monday they collected in Hollister for the 6th annual Prom Dress Drive, organized in part by Pamela Whittington of Classic Vapor Dry Cleaners. Local high school girls are encouraged to shop for free prom dresses Saturday, April 12 at the Santa Cruz Teen Center. (Dan Coyro.— Santa Cruz Sentinel)



Classic Vapor Dry Cleaners owner Pamela Whittington, at left, will collect thousands of donated prom dresses for local high school girls to wear to their proms. (Dan Coyro — Santa Cruz Sentinel)

"The economy is just really stifled, and the girls can't afford to go to the prom," Whittington said. "They're talking to the young men who are asking them, and just quietly saying 'no.'"

"This is a way they're getting that lifetime dream. It is a woman entering her adulthood," Whittington said.

Whittington vividly recalled the happy tears — and mascara stream — one girl experienced after finding the perfect dress a couple of years ago when she thought nothing would be available in her size.

"It was the first time in her life she saw herself as a beautiful woman. It was amazing," Whittington said. "It was life-changing. Something so simple, you don't think could be so life-changing. But (it gives) you the confidence, the courage, the desire."

The initiative was founded in 2009 by former Santa Cruz City Councilman Tony Madrigal, who approached Whittington. Madrigal is now on the Modesto City Council. He started a prom dress drive and tuxedo giveaway there last year.

Cynthia and Sarah Holthouse brought in some three dozen dresses from a collection point at Prospect Mortgage in Hollister. Sarah Holthouse, a 17-year-old senior at Monte Vista Christian School, decided to organize the dress drive for her part of the county after attending a youth leadership conference more than a year ago that urged her to give back.

"I was really excited to see the reactions of the girls last year," Sarah Holthouse said of getting involved in the project. "I really took a lot a back from it, because it like, really helps our community."

Holthouse said that she was gratified to see a friend she knew from school take advantage of the dress giveaway.

"It's new for you, a new chapter in your life when you take home a dress," Holthouse said of the dress shopping.

Drop-off points, some of which include the three Classic Vapor Cleaners locations, Comerica Banks, local UPS Store outlets, Familia Center, Live Oak Family Resource Center and La Manzanita Community Resources, are still accepting donated dress drop-offs. Visit www.promdressdrive.org for information.

Free Prom Dress Drive Boutiques

Santa Cruz: 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., April 12, Santa Cruz Teen Center, 301 Center St

Hollister: 12 to 4 p.m., April 13, The Vault, 452 San Benito St.

Watsonville: 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., April 19, YWCA, 340 East Beach St.

Details: www.promdressdrive.org