

PROM ON A BUDGET

Students find ways to cut the cost but keep the magic of the big night

Originally published in The Blade on Sunday, April 12, 2009

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Prom is supposed to be a magical time, one final fling before high school seniors head off to the real world. It's a night filled with excess and elegance, tuxes and fancy gowns, sometimes even limos.

But for some students mired in the faltering economy, it's filled with something else too: Penny-pinching.

"We've all been talking about it. Everyone's been talking about trying to get money for prom," said Greg Zielinski, a senior at Springfield High School.

He hopes to keep spending under \$250 this year, but who knows with expenses that include \$60 for prom, \$30 for after-prom, more than \$100 for his tux, and \$40 for a corsage. Tickets at his school won't include dinner this year, so Mr. Zielinski and some friends may have dinner at one of their homes to save cash.

"I've been working my butt off trying to get money for all of this," he said.

Making prom the perfect night is no cheap feat for girls either. A 2008 survey by the Hearst Teen Network determined that girls spent an average of \$236 on their prom dresses and \$135 on accessories. Add to that \$111 for beauty products and hair care and you've got one expensive night.

That's not to say there's a sense of panic. Tammy Tibbetts, editor of www.mypromstyle.com, said many teens aren't letting economics put an damper on their enchanted evening.

"The majority of teens aren't spending less or communicating a lot of worry about affording prom," she said. "By and large, I think, prom isn't something that teen girls just start saving up for or thinking about their senior year. They've been thinking about it for the last four years."

For those who would still like to save a few bucks, there are plenty of options, including wearing a dress from a previous occasion or swapping with someone else.

"I am borrowing a dress from one of my friends," said Melissa Dojcsak, a junior at Bedford High School in Temperance, Mich. She plans to attend prom as a "couple" with a friend to save money because the ticket price is cheaper that way.

Other recessionistas — women who want to look fabulous without spending top dollar — may look for deals on secondhand dresses at various special events around town or check out a nationwide network at www.donatemydress.org.

Last weekend, Planned Pethood Inc. sponsored Prom for Paws, selling donated dresses at steep discounts. The fund-raiser for the organization featured about 350 new and gently used gowns, with none priced at more than \$40.

"We want to help young ladies be able to attend prom that normally wouldn't be able to get such a pretty dress with the economy the way it is ...," said Chrissa Liskai, event chairman.

The Greater Toledo Urban League Young Professionals are accepting donations until Wednesday for their own prom dress drive.



Ashley Jones checks out a prom gown at a dress drive, Prom for Paws, at Towpath Village. (THE BLADE/AMY E. VOIGT)

"Every girl wants to have a nice prom and she wants to look nice," said Jamilah Jones, president of the group, who has donated some of her own dresses to the effort.

The event will take place Sunday from 3 to 6 p.m. at Nevaeh Salon and Spa, 4903 Dorr St., where donations may be made. Those dresses will be free and there will be discounts available from Nevaeh as well as raffled deals to help with prom. Dress donations also will be accepted at 701 Jefferson Ave.

For all those things aside from the dress, don't despair. Help is out there.

"Use your resources," suggested Paiton Twitty, a senior at Start High School. "There's so many other people out there who know how to do hair, nails, and makeup than the professionals. Don't be afraid to go to people like that."

Last year, she got help from her mom with her hair and from her sister with her nails.

For the guys, some tuxedo rental shops offer the chance to be a prom representative who passes out coupons at school. For every coupon that is used to rent a tux, the representative receives his own discount.

All of this is a long way of saying that prom still can be as magical as ever. Nick Hensel, a junior at Start High School, tried to put it in perspective. "Prom isn't meant for everybody to spend so much money. It's just meant to have fun," he said. "It's the final memory for a senior before graduation."

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