

Hope Closet in Royal Oak makes prom special for girls in need **WITH VIDEO**

Friday, April 12, 2013

By **MEGAN SEMERAZ**
Of The Oakland Press

One local mother believes that every young woman deserves the opportunity to attend special high school events such as prom in a dress of their choice regardless of their financial situation.

Whitney Drake of Livonia has been helping girls who are in need of a formal dress and accessories since 2002 through Hope Closet. The organization gives new and gently used dresses to girls who cannot afford one.

They also get to pick one accessory such as shoes.

The idea for the organization came to Drake when she was watching “The Oprah Winfrey Show.” On the show was an organization in Chicago that gave prom dresses to girls in need — an idea that was spreading across the nation.



Drake said there was a website featured on the show that showed whether there was a similar organization near your town. When she checked the website, there wasn't one in Metro Detroit.

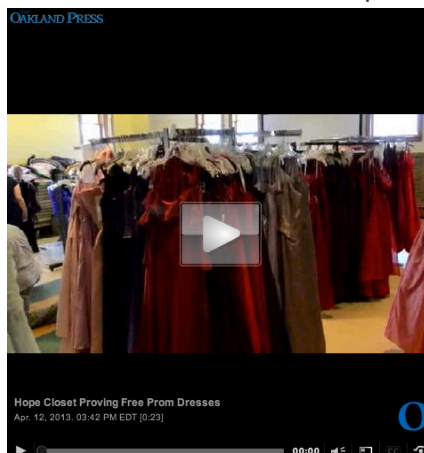
That's when Drake became one of the founders and president of Hope Closet, a nonprofit which will be opening its

boutique for prom dresses on Saturday. Girls will have more than 5,000 dresses to choose from.

To ensure the program, which runs from April 13 through April 20, runs smoothly, they have a couple of rules.

First, students must make an appointment by phone.

Each girl will get their own personal shopper, a volunteer, when they arrive



at their appointment be enrolled in high school to receive a dress. Each student will need to present a valid student ID card, or other proof of enrollment. A letter from a homeschool teacher is accepted.

Drake said that about 500 dresses are given away each year.

Amy Regal, owner of Glamour Puss Beauty Bar & Boutique and Party Girls in Franklin, thought this was a good cause to donate to.

Regal, who has been in business for seven years, donated 75 brand new prom dresses valued at more than \$27,000 to Hope Closet.



“I was fortunate enough to have a business opportunity to absorb a large inventory of dresses,” Regal said. “I thought it would be great to contribute them to a charity.”

The dresses were acquired from a store that closed called Cinderella’s Castle, but Regal made it clear that they were

not just handed to her.

Regal said she had an abundance of dresses, long dresses especially, which were not all going to fit in her store.

“I really didn’t have room for all those gowns,” Regal said. “I had to determine what was going to be in the new store.”

“I thought it was a nice opportunity to pay it forward and give back to the community,” Regal said. “I thought it would be really nice to contribute to a charity in Oakland County and I decided that Hope Closet would be best.”

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FYI

Hope Closet is at Royal Oak First United Methodist Church at 320 W. Seventh St. in Royal Oak. The boutique will be open for a week beginning Saturday. To visit Hope Closet, you must make an appointment by calling 248-347-1309. Donations still are greatly appreciated — especially plus-sized dresses. All donations can be dropped off during boutique hours. To learn more information, visit www.hopecloset.com