

Prom Project helps students arrive in style

Public can donate gently used prom wear to help students who need support

By Stephanie James

With many dresses and suits already donated to the Prom Project, local students will be able to graduate in style.

Some households can find it difficult to purchase a dress or suit for their daughter or son to wear for their prom or graduation nights.

The Hastings and Prince Edward District School Board, through their Student Emergency Fund program, has been working hard to get the word out about the Prom Project.

The Prom Project is an opportunity for members of the public to donate their gently used prom dresses and suits, which will be sent to different high schools and elementary schools in the Hastings and Prince Edward County area. Students then have the chance to choose a dress or suit from the selection to wear to their prom or Grade 8 graduation, free of cost.

"It's about being inclusive. Everyone deserves to celebrate their prom," said Maribeth deSnoo, executive director of the Hastings and Prince Edward Learning Foundation and the main contact for the Prom Project.

In addition to donating graduation items to the schools, Glenda Tracey, the manager of Shoppers Drug Mart in the Quinte Mall, will be providing makeup kits, also free of charge, to all schools participating.

deSnoo says the idea of the Prom Project is to make it

feel welcoming for students, and that inquiries about the Prom Project have been tremendous from both parents and principals wanting to get involved.

The project does not just stop at public donations. Local businesses such as Trenton Clothing and Repair and Nan's Health and Wellness in Bancroft have opened their doors as places for people to drop off their used dresses and suits. Also, a number of clothing cleaners in the Trenton and Belleville area have offered to dryclean all of the items for free.

One major sponsor of the Prom Project is Dresses and Dreams Bridal Boutique, located in downtown Belleville. The store already has a count of roughly 40 dresses of different colours and sizes to pass on to the Prom Project.

Store owner Belinda Price-Hewton says her store wanted to get involved with proms in some way this year and that the Prom Project was the perfect opportunity.

With lots of last year's prom dresses still in stock, Dresses and Dreams will be donating a selection to the Prom Project if they are not sold by April and 10 per cent of the money the store makes from prom dress sales will go toward helping students to buy tickets to their proms and other proceeds for the project.

"I would rather donate them to a good cause," said Price-Hewton.

During its first year, the Prom Project is only accepting dresses and suits but hopes to widen the range of items that can be donated to shoes, purses and jewelry, and other items students could put to use to add



Photo by Stephanie James

Maribeth deSnoo, executive director of the Hastings and Prince Edward Learning Foundation, shows examples of dresses donated to the Prom Project. Suits and dresses will be available to local students for proms and graduations who may be lacking the funds to purchase one on their own.

Outbreaks regular part of flu season

Gastric outbreaks a common occurrence in nursing homes

By Sarah Schofield

The Hastings and Prince Edward County Health Unit reports that there have been more instances this year of enteric outbreaks which leads to diarrhea and vomiting.

Stephanie McFaul, program manager of the department of communicable disease control at the health unit, described the most recurring diseases.

"The ones that we deal with the most in our long-term care facilities for instance this season is the norovirus, a gastro-enteric illness, which causes vomiting and diarrhea. It's highly contagious and spreads throughout the community. Usually what we see happening in our facilities is a reflection of what is happening in our communities."

Respiratory and gastric outbreaks are a common seasonal occurrence in nursing homes. There have been an estimated 10-15 outbreaks of flu this season in care facilities. This figure is an estimate involving long-term care facilities. Retirement homes and hospitals are not necessarily required to report to the health unit, said McFaul.

Carol Snell, media relations consultant of HPECHU, said that having an outbreak in a nursing home is not something to panic over.

"There is often something going on in an old folks home. If there are several people that have something they have to report it but it's not necessarily indicative that there is something terrible, it's just that it's a vulnerable population to keep a close eye on."

Susan Rowe, director of public affairs and community relations for Quinte Health Care, described the procedures used during an outbreak.

"We do have an infection control team here and we are continually monitoring for symptoms of a variety of infectious diseases."

"We see an increase in people coming into the hospital and the community with influenza so that's something we keep a closer eye on and we are impacted by in our emergency rooms and in patient units of our hospitals."

Hospitals and long-term care facilities employ precautions when dealing with outbreaks such as using personal protective equipment like masks, gloves and gowns, depending on which specific situation they are dealing with. However, the best way to help prevent the spread of diseases and viruses is to stop transmission before it has a chance, especially when dealing with the elderly.

McFaul explained the most effective way to prevent the transmittal of germs is to not to introduce them in the first place.

"It's important to instill in ourselves to stay away from homes like that because we don't want to introduce germs to those types of facilities. If you're ill and not feeling well it's best to stay home. Anytime you go out in the public you have the chance that you could be spreading your germs to the others. If you do need to go out, cover your coughs and sneezes with tissues and throw it out. Remember to wash your hands."

Health officials say no emergent infectious diseases are on the horizon.

"It's more just of the regular hand hygiene practices and preventative health measures to stay healthy during the winter flu season," said McFaul.

Different issues to be highlighted at Docfest

Empire Theatre location for gala to kick off event

By Rhea Munroe

Belleville is presenting the first-ever Downtown Docfest, which will feature many films about different issues, both local and around the world.

The gala for the Downtown Docfest will be held in the Empire Theatre on March 2 at 7 p.m. It will feature music from the documentary *Music from the Big House*, which will be followed by a live performance by Rita Chiarelli.

Starting at noon on March 2, documentaries will be shown at the CORE at 223 Pinnacle st., followed by the gala at 7 p.m. Films will continue to be shown at

the Belleville Public Library and CORE centre starting at noon on March 3. Approximately 30 films will be shown during the festival.

Gary Magwood, co-director of Docfest, said that the documentaries will cover a variety of different topics, from poverty to sexual abuse.

"In the news you get 30-second blurbs about what's going on in the world, a documentary goes deeper into the issue," said Magwood.

The idea of Downtown Docfest started about a year ago with a "flurry of e-mails," said Magwood. By March, all the discussion and planning will take shape when Docfest comes to Belleville.

The committee wants to hold the event for the next three years, in hopes that it will flourish and the anticipation will build each year so that it can continue on past the set time-frame.

Magwood looked at the Peterborough

film festival and the eight years it has been running. He said he hopes Belleville will see the same success.

"It has potential," said Magwood. Magwood said he is hoping that the wide range of documentaries will spark a conversation within the community about the issues at hand.

There is also hope that Docfest will liven up Belleville's social calendar. He hopes to show people what Belleville is all about beyond the Quinte Mall.

The documentary festival will be screening approximately 30 films over the two days, using three theatres in the CORE, with a total of 600 seats, and a room in the Belleville Public Library. About three or four of the films are locally-made documentaries.

The Downtown Docfest press release stated that they have "very generous support from Pretsell Cavanaugh Davies Lawyers" for the gala.

"We are pleased to provide our support for the Downtown Belleville Documentary Film Festival," said Mike Pretsell in the release.

The law firm is also helping to bring the documentary, *Music from the Big House*, to Docfest. "As documentaries often expose and deal with issues around fairness and injustice, issues that lawyers deal with every day, was the reason we approached a law firm (for sponsorship). We are thrilled to have their support in bringing this award-winning film about truth, conviction and belief."

If you would like to volunteer at the Downtown Docfest, e-mail volunteer@downtowndocfest.ca.

Tickets are available at the Loyalist Bookstore, the Empire Theatre, and Quinte Arts Council for \$30 per adult, \$15 for students.

See www.downtowndocfest.ca for the full list of ticket locations.

Sold-out murder mystery dinner a play to die for

Two-night productions of church members a community affair

By Sarah Schofield

A fake red fingernail, greasy mechanic's cloth and a leftover ring were some of the clues left at the scene of the crime at Friday's murder mystery dinner at Westminster United Church in Belleville.

The sold-out event, which ran for two nights on Friday and Saturday, was a big success with the audience.

Shirley Mullin, the kitchen manager and Westminster United Church member, said she was pleased with the event's success.

"We're sold out. We're sold out tonight. We served 97 people tonight and we're serving 100 people tomorrow night."

The murder mystery is in its second consecutive year. The play, titled *Fatal Reunion*, was written and produced entirely by Sue Demczynna, who also played one of the lead characters - Tina Stiletto.

The play follows a group of very different personalities who graduated from high school 20 years earlier. As the production progresses and we hear about what Fritz Charming, a cocky, prankster, used to be like years earlier, we learn that each character has a motive to do him harm.

All 10 actors, aside from one, attend the same church and have been working hard to make the play the best it can be.

Actress Debbie Schaap, who plays Jeannie Cash, a free-spirited new age hippie, described just how much work went into the two-night production.



Photo by Sarah Schofield

Westminster United Church's murder mystery dinner production of Fatal Reunion got into full swing with the murder of Fritz Charming, played by Adri Boodoosingh on Feb. 10. Other members of the play include (l-r), Arthur "Squirrel" Knutzioli, Heather Cockerline, Steve MacKinnon, Shawn Legere and Chris Thompson.

"There's a lot of energy that goes into the sets, all the props, all the costumes. All the actors were in charge of their own costumes but we had one person who did all the props. Another couple did the sets for us. It's been a real team effort from the church."

Mullin said the church group is a unique place to house a production like this.

"Everybody pulls together. Westminster is a community project-driven church. They like doing things together. They always have done the whole time I've been associated with the church and when there's something like this happening, they always support it in space, which is fabulous."

The hard work on the part of the production team and kitchen staff was evident multiple times throughout the night. In the basement of the church, the recurring colours of black and pink were visible in streamers, tablecloths and serviettes. The basement of the church was transformed into a high school reunion from 1977 with jukeboxes and even an old yearbook with all the play's characters.

Marilyn Sager, a member of the church who attended the event for the first time, had nothing but good things to say about it.

"My favourite part is the reunion itself and all the characters. It's amazing the talent that is around."

Not only was the event a success, but the dinner portion of the night was as well, Sager said.

"I had chicken and fruit. It was good. The ladies in this church are phenomenal cooks."

No doubt next year's murder mystery dinner, if held again, will once again be a sold-out, smashing success.