



Cinderella gets a new pair of shoes

A Bothell-based non-profit plays fairy godmother to those who want to attend the ball but have nothing to wear

By Amy Hatch

October 16, 2008

Giving back is second nature to Jackie Hallstrom. All her adult life, when she wasn't working, she could usually be found volunteering her time with local children's charities and homeless community services. So it wasn't surprising that when friends or family members asked to borrow an evening gown or cocktail dress for an event they couldn't otherwise attend, Jackie's closet doors were always open.

Her eventually emptied closet soon compelled her to team up with her best friend, Christine Nagel, to create Cinderella's Trunk, a Bothell-based non-profit organization that provides formal wear and accessories to men, women, and teenagers across Western Washington to make some very memorable experiences possible.

While almost 95 percent of Cinderella's Trunk clients are teenagers, there is also an adult contingency that relies on the generous services of Cinderella's Trunk to participate in significant events such as the Policeman's Ball or the Navy Ball.

Since its inception in 2000, Cinderella's Trunk has helped more than 12,000 individuals by outfitting them with formal wear, accessories, makeup, and shoes.

To get the word out about their services, Nagel, Hallstrom, and their team of volunteers notify local high schools, churches, social workers, and homeless shelters. They also have been able to enlist the support of a handful of corporate donors, including Boeing, Safeco, and Washington Mutual.

"Every time we see a client's face light up or the joy on a mother's face when she gets to see her daughter all dressed up and she knows that her child will have this opportunity, it makes all the work worth it," says Hallstrom.

She has hundreds of stories of young ladies, gentlemen, and adults who have expressed their gratitude for Cinderella's Trunk, like the one about a grateful high school senior, who after being placed in a foster home was brought into Cinderella's Trunk by her new foster parents. The girl was so impressed by the process that she wrote to Hallstrom promising to return to Cinderella's Trunk on college breaks to help volunteer.

The need for Cinderella's Trunk has increased significantly over the past year and will likely continue to grow as the struggling economy forces many local families to cut out excess spending. Since September 6 of this year, when Cinderella's Trunk opened its doors for homecoming shopping, they've seen a 30 percent increase in shoppers.

While no one is turned away, the majority of Cinderella's Trunk clientele — more than 95 percent — fall into the low-to-moderate income bracket: those who are eligible to receive government and federal support

for basic needs. Through Cinderella's Trunk, clothing and accessories are provided free of charge to clients, with only a small, fully refundable deposit required.

"These are clients that have a real need. Without support, they would not have been able to participate in these events," says Hallstrom.

With the economy in trouble, the need for volunteers has increased as well. Hallstrom has found that some of Cinderella's Trunk's regular volunteers now need to work second jobs or longer hours at their current jobs and don't have the bandwidth they once did to help out.

Volunteers are needed to help as personal shoppers on "boutique days," the few days each month when Cinderella's Trunk opens its doors to let clients shop. On any given boutique day, Cinderella's Trunk may see upwards of 100 to 150 clients, so the need for volunteers is great. Volunteers play a very key role, assisting clients with finding the perfect outfit, while making the shopper feel as important as they are, a true boost to any kid's self-esteem.

Help out

- Volunteer your time as a personal shopper.
- Donate formal wear and accessories. Currently there is a real need for new or gently used jewelry and new or gently used men's tuxedo pants.
- Make a cash donation to Cinderella's Trunk.
- Spread the word — tell anyone you know that can help or may be in need of Cinderella's Trunk's services for an upcoming event.

Learn more

Visit Cinderella's Trunk's Web site, or call Shelli Hugg, donations director, at 206-240-0016.

Party on

"La Belle Notte," to benefit Cinderella's Trunk: Join Cinderella's Trunk this Saturday, October 18 at La Belle Notte, a gala to benefit the organization. Doors open at 6:30 p.m. for dancing, a fashion show, and a silent auction. All proceeds benefit Cinderella's Trunk. Tickets are \$35 per person. To reserve your tickets for the gala, please contact Shelli Hugg at 206-240-0016 or send an e-mail to her here.

Amy Hatch is a freelance writer and corporate marketer who lives in Seattle.

View this story online at: <http://crosscut.com/2008/10/16/nonprofits-philanthropy/18568/>

© 2009 Crosscut Public Media. All rights reserved.