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Prom wishes granted

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Junior League helps girls get everything they need for big night

By Sara Cunningham

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It was hard to tell what part of yesterday made Erica Monteith happier: She found the perfect dress for her second prom and she watched her twin sister find a dress for her first prom.

And neither of them had to pay for a thing.

"I'm just so excited for her," Erica said as she stood clutching her bright red dress and watching her sister, Jamerica Monteith, stand in front of a mirror with a silver and black dress.

The girls, both 17 and students at Ballard High School, were part of a group of 50 girls invited yesterday to indulge in dresses, shoes, jewelry and makeup — all for free.

The Junior League of Louisville worked with local high schools and businesses to put on its first Bloom Boutique at the Muhammad Ali Center.

The event provided low-income Louisville high school girls with just about everything they needed to get gussied up for prom this year. The girls were nominated by their principals and guidance counselors.

"These are exceptional students who have overcome adversity through their high school experience and they are good leaders in their communities," said Darla Hartlage, one of the event organizers.

"We wanted to give them something they deserved because they've really earned it in other ways," Hartlage said.

As the girls arrived, they were checked in and then sent to wardrobe, where volunteers helped them search through racks and racks of dresses.

Some of the girls tried on more than a couple before finding just the right one.

"Destiny tried on about 15,000 because she's so picky," Shatova Buckner , 18, said.

"I did not. Only six maybe," Destiny Rhodes , 17, said, laughing. Both girls are students at Seneca High School.

When they found a dress, the girls moved on to shoes and accessories. Most girls were able to find handbags and jewelry to go with their new gowns. Next up was makeup as they got makeovers and tips from a Bobbi Brown Cosmetics makeup artist. Everything was provided through donations.

The Junior League organizers hope to hold the event again next year, Hartlage said.

"Prom is such a big deal — you're supposed to feel like a princess," said Amy Williams , a 24-year-old urban planner and Junior League volunteer. Of all the events she's worked for the Junior League, yesterday was one of her favorites.

"This is a need that's sort of overlooked a lot," Williams said. "It's nice to be a part of making this special for someone."

The day helped Jamerica get ready for her first prom, she said, but it also let her spend time with her sister, Erica.

"This all feels pretty great, like I'm a celebrity," Jamerica said. "It's also just nice to be hanging out with my sister. It's some good girl bonding."

Reporter Sara Cunningham can be reached at (502) 582-4335.

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