

## Giving the world with diamonds and pearls

Written by Chris Garner, Contributing Writer  
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“It’s more than just a dress,” the Diamonds and Pearls Project is offering young, under privileged girls, the concept of beauty that exudes inside as well as out.

Tiana Hall, along with seven other board members including her mother Angela Hall, Conchetta DeLeon, Winter Olaofe, Nina Mentzos , and Ashleigh Tillman, have set out to make sure prom is no longer a financial burden for the urban teen, but a time for them to enjoy being young. Hall and a few of her close friends set out to accomplish this goal last April when they decided to go forward with her idea of helping some of Minneapolis’ deserving teens. Thus, the Diamonds and Pearl Project was born.

This idea stemmed from the California-based charity The Princess Project, a similar Minnesota program, Give-a-Gown, and the North Minneapolis native’s own experiences of addressing financial issues during her time in high school. “We know that [North Minneapolis] needs this type of service and opportunity,” said Tillman, one of the Diamonds and Pearls Project board members. As a North Minneapolis school teacher, she has also seen first hand these financial hardships.

So far the project has held two Diamonds and Pearls events, one which was recently held at Heritage Park. Through word of mouth board members were able to collect new to slightly used dresses, accessories, and services.

Young ladies seeking to take advantage in this unique opportunity started lining-up at 8 am, hoping to be one of the first prom-bound girls to get fitted for a dress when the doors opened at 10 am. Girls only had to bring a school I.D. and were allowed to bring one guest over the age of 18. Booths were set up where the young ladies had the opportunity to choose a dress, accessories, and have make-up and hair done to compliment their look. They were also offered alterations.

Groups and companies that donated their services were Mary Kay; Accent Store Fixtures; Lights, Camera, Action Salon and Spa, Erbert's & Gerberts , Navas Driving School, The Chiseler Barber & Beauty Shop; and Megan S. Sherwin Photography, as well as Brooklyn Park Recreation & Parks , Heritage Park Community, and Zanewood Recreation Center who donated

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their time and space. Girls also had a chance to participate in a drawing for an opportunity to have their senior pictures taken by Megan Sherwin.

The events have been promoted by word of mouth and flyers in high traffic areas, as well as on the Internet via Craig's List. This year, Diamonds and Pearls has collected over 200 dresses, exceeding their goal. "Next year we plan to be able to serve at least 150 girls," said Tillman.

Tillman said Diamonds and Pearls Project are through with events for the year, but will be collecting dresses through out the rest of this year for up coming formal events. She also stated that they promote all the girls who participated this year to spread the word and donate back to the project.

For more information on the Diamonds and Pearls Project, contact Ashleigh Tillman directly at [ashleightil@gmail.com](mailto:ashleightil@gmail.com).

Additional information is also available on the organization's webpage: [thediamondsandpearlsproject.org](http://thediamondsandpearlsproject.org).