



The Brides Project

By Lori Stone

The wedding dress is a big part of every wedding, a prized possession worn on one of the most exciting days of a woman's life. Many of us have or know someone that has a wedding dress hanging in the back of their closet. The confetti has since fallen, with moments of your special day in photos and forever ingrained into your memory. What happens to the beautiful gown you cherished? Do you store the dress in a box and slide it under the bed? Hang it in the back of your closet? Store it in a box in the attic or basement?

What if your gown could bask in its glory again, bringing new cherished memories for another bride's perfect day? What if you could also provide cancer patients and their families with services to improve their quality of life? You can do this! By generously donating your dress you can be socially conscious and make a difference in the lives of individuals and their families who have been affected by cancer.

The Brides Project, originating in Toronto, Canada, was brought to the Ann Arbor area by founder Monique Sluymers, to help provide programs and services for the Cancer Support Community (CSC) of Greater Ann Arbor. Barb Hiltz, Executive Director of the CSC, hoped that, like any new business, they would not lose money their first year. According to Barb, "Our committee set a target of \$25,000 in sales that first year. In our first full fiscal year open we raised \$85,000 in sales and got a capacity grant to cover many of the expenses related to staff time involved. This year our goal is to raise \$100,000 and to date we are on track to reach that number."

Currently there are five UM SSW student interns performing their field placement at CSC, with another student starting in January; this student will be working with The Brides Project. Cassie Petoskey, a 2013 UM SSW graduate, was an intern at CSC and became involved with The Brides Project immediately when the doors first opened in September of 2011. Being the only student on the project, Cassie was driven to ensure The Brides Project was a success. The proceeds provide 25% of the CSC operating costs. This enables support services to individuals with cancer and their families and connects them with others that face similar challenges and struggles. Cassie stated that working with The Brides Project was, "really rewarding as a student because there was so much to do."

The Brides Project has 40-50 volunteers on average, with

additional volunteers needed to be consultants.

Volunteer consultants help brides find their dresses at the shop. Cassie worked closely with the volunteers of The Brides Project. She organized events such as a fashion show (where friends of Cassie modeled dresses), found the right roles for volunteers and performed marketing duties.

Cassie also played an integral part of the committee planning of day to day operations. All volunteers attend training for Bridal consulting, as the dresses require special care. Cassie explained that "The Brides Project is helping to support families that are in a different place. All proceeds go to CSC support programs and services for people touched by cancer." Some of the programs offered are support groups, educational workshops, social activities, and nutrition classes.

The Brides Project boutique offers a unique shopping experience and is currently located at 1689 Plymouth Road in Ann Arbor. Boutique space is donated and holds hundreds of gowns. To keep with fashion trends, The Brides Project accepts dresses that are current and those dating back no further than 2005. The bridal gowns are sold at 50% or more off of market prices, providing an affordable and community conscious way to buy that dream dress. Purchasing your special gown from The Brides Project is not only affordable, it's easy. Shopping at The Brides Project is by appointment only. Interested brides to be are asked to not wear make-up or self-tanner when trying on dresses and to limit guests to two as space is limited. If you are interested in giving a gift to cancer patients and their families, or if you are a bride to be, you can contact The Brides Project through their website

www.thebridesproject.org.



thebridesproject.org

