

Ambassador

SPECIAL EDITION 2013

GOODWILL

Wedding Gala

2013

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who have trouble finding and
keeping jobs.

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Special Thanks:

Ashley's Bride Guide
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Bridal & Formals by RJs
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On the cover: Ashley and Grant after the ceremony. Photo by Nathan Morgan

Wedding Gala 2012

Designer gowns
worth as much
as \$6,000, are all
priced from \$49
to \$399.



Designer gowns by:
Vera Wang
Watters & Watters
Casablanca
Alfred Angelo
Demetrios
Maggie Sottero
Forever Yours
Mori Lee
Dere Kiang
Mary's Bridals

Most brides will tell you their gown is one of the most important purchases they will make for their big day, but that dream dress doesn't have to cost a fortune. At Goodwill's annual Wedding Gala, brides can find their gown at a fraction of the cost. Designer gowns worth as much as \$6,000, are all priced from \$49 to \$399.

At last year's event, brides came from Texas, Ohio, Georgia, Alabama, Kentucky and all across Tennessee to attend the third annual Wedding Gala, and they came early. Brides started lining up outside Goodwill's Rivergate store the day before the big sale. The first bride arrived at 7:30 p.m. and, when the doors opened at 6 a.m., more than 350 people sprinted into the store.

Because dressing rooms fill up quickly, brides had come prepared. Many wore bodysuits or tank tops and tights so they could try on gowns in the middle of the aisle. And nearly all of the brides brought at least one friend or family member to help them along the way.

The entire event was filled with tears, laughter and excitement. In fact, when a bride found her dream dress, others would cheer and clap.

During the big sale, 322 dresses were sold. There were also more than 200 pieces of jewelry, dozens of veils, and several pairs of shoes purchased that morning.

You can bet this year's Wedding Gala will be even better. Natisha Moultry, Community Relations Manager, and her team have been working on the March 2013 event since last March. She says, "We have double the number of dresses this year, and there are multiple gowns in every size from zero to 28."

But before we get to this year's event, we want to introduce you to some of the brides from last year's Wedding Gala. They camped out overnight and left the next morning with their dream dress. ♦



A Proposal and a Pearl

Abigail and Austin were teenagers when they met for the first time. “We were at a Christian concert at Austin Peay State University,” she says. “Neither one of us wanted to be there, but I guess it was God’s will because that’s how we met.”

Over the next several months, the two developed a strong friendship, but then Austin and his family left Clarksville and moved to New York. Abigail and Austin never lost touch.

When they went off to college, the distance between them went from 14 hours to four. Austin chose to go to the University of Alabama and Abigail went to Union University in Jackson, Tennessee. “We tried the long distance thing when we were freshman. But we were too young at the time, so after six months we called it quits.”

Abigail and Austin remained friends, and then two years later, they decided to give dating another try. The couple had been together a year and a half when Austin proposed in August 2011. He had planned a special evening for them in Nashville, but that afternoon, Austin decided he couldn’t wait any longer. “I was sitting on my parents’ front porch, stuffing my face with chicken salad. He walks over to me and says ‘I can’t keep any secrets from you. I have to tell you something.’ Then he starts talking about our past and how much he loves me,” she says. “I just thought he was being sweet, so I continued to eat. Then he gets down on one knee, and at that moment I knew what was about to happen, so I finally put the food away. He was so nervous he pronounced my middle name wrong.”

Austin made up for it by getting Abigail exactly what she wanted. “I had told him that if he loved me enough, he would get me a pearl, not a diamond. When he pulled out a pearl ring, I started crying, and then he started crying.”

The couple decided on September 2012 for their wedding, which gave them a little over a year to plan. During the first six months, they had made some decisions and purchases, but Abigail was struggling with what to do about her wedding gown. “I didn’t want to pay hundreds of dollars for a dress, so I had decided I was going to make it.”

But that all changed during a shopping visit to a Goodwill store in Clarksville. “During one of my weekly visits to the store, I saw a sign about the Wedding Gala,” she says. “I called my maid of honor



At 3 p.m., Abigail walked down the aisle in her one-of-a-kind dress and her mother’s pearls.

and told her, ‘We’re doing this, you don’t have a choice.’”

Abigail and her maid of honor decided to make the Wedding Gala an event they would never forget. They left work early on Friday, went out to eat and then showed up at the Rivergate store around 8:15 p.m. At that time, there were only two brides in line.

The girls didn’t know what to expect, so they had brought a tent, but ended up just using camping chairs and blankets. During their 10 hour wait, four others joined them including Austin who was forced to leave when the doors opened. “That’s when things got crazy.”

Since Abigail needed a size zero wedding gown, she and her group grabbed all of the small sizes. But it was her mother who pulled “the one.” “She brings me this gown and I can tell it is way too big for me, but it was exactly like the dress I was going to make, except it had sleeves.”

Alteration experts from Nicholson’s Cleaners attend the Wedding Gala every year to help brides like Abigail. “They assured me that I could remove the sleeves and make this size eight a zero.”

Abigail stood in line for 10 hours waiting for the doors to open, but it only took her one hour to find her dress. “It was \$69.99,” she

says. “The material is worth way more than that.”

Alterations ended up costing Abigail \$80, which put the total price of the dress at \$169.99. “I couldn’t have made my dress for that price, and the end product was everything I wanted.”

Abigail and Austin were looking at other ways to save on their big day, and they came up with some creative ideas. They fell in love with a wedding venue, but they couldn’t afford the price. It was a farm in Woodlawn, so they asked the owners if they could do work on the property for a price reduction. “We spent four Saturdays working on that farm, and they ended up giving us a great deal.”

On September 29, Abigail walked down the aisle in her one-of-a-kind dress and her mother’s pearls. The 15 minute outdoor wedding on the farm took place in front of a small group of family and friends. The reception was held inside the barn.

Abigail didn’t mind working to save money on her big day. She also didn’t mind waiting 10 hours to find her perfect dress for the right price. “I loved the whole Wedding Gala experience,” she says. “I would do it all over again.” ♦



PHOTOS BY EBBIE DAVIS PHOTOGRAPHY



PHOTOS BY NATHAN MORGAN PHOTOGRAPHY



A Bride on a Budget

Ashley's love story began 13 years ago. She was attending MTSU and working at Outback Steakhouse when a co-worker caught her eye. It wasn't long before Ashley and Grant started dating, but after a two year relationship, the couple went their separate ways.

Several years later, Ashley and Grant reconnected as friends and, in 2011, the two started dating again. Both had graduated college and were working in their fields: Ashley as a teacher, and Grant as an IT support technician. "This time was different," she says. "We were older and the timing was right."

In February 2012, the couple went on a weekend hiking trip to Georgia with friends. They stayed in a rustic lodge at the top of a mountain along the Appalachian Trail. The group had gone on a hike, and then to dinner. "After we ate, we walked to an overlook, and I just remember thinking something was wrong with him. It was then that he proposed."

Ashley had only been engaged a month when she heard about the Goodwill Wedding Gala. At that point, she had already visited a few bridal boutiques. But because of her love of Goodwill and a good bargain, she decided to give it a try. "Since we were newly engaged, my adventure to find the dress was one of the first things I did for my wedding."

When Ashley and her friend Jenny arrived at the Rivergate store at 10:30 p.m., there were already nine other brides in line. They had brought camping chairs and quilts to help them get through the nearly eight hour wait. At 5 a.m., two other girlfriends, Melanie and Jessica, showed up. Then Ashley got a sweet surprise from her fiancé—coffee and donuts for the group.

When the doors opened at 6 a.m., Ashley and her friends went

"By saving so much money on my dress, it allowed us to stick to our \$5,000 budget."

straight to her size and started pulling as many dresses as they could hold. Ashley had come prepared. She wore a bodysuit which allowed her to try on dresses in the middle of the store. "I think I tried on 15 to 20, and there were three I really liked."

Ashley was looking for a vintage type dress with lace, so when a friend showed her a simple dress with spaghetti straps, she initially said no. But when she tried it on, it felt right. "As I walked over to a mirror, several other brides told me if I didn't get it they wanted to try it on," she says. "When I saw it, I knew it was the one. The shape was the right fit for me."

The Alura Bridal gown was not only the right fit but at \$139.99, it was also the right price. "By saving so much money on my dress, it allowed us to stick to our \$5,000 budget."

Ashley and Grant said "I do" on October 7 in front of about 85 guests at a small chapel at Montgomery Bell State Park. When Ashley walked down the aisle, she was wearing her gown from Goodwill and a veil that added a sentimental touch. "My friend Amanda made my veil using the lace from the wedding dress my mother and three of my aunts had worn, so that was really special."

The sunset reception took place at the park's outdoor pavilion. In an effort to save even more money, Ashley purchased most of her reception décor at Goodwill, including the cobalt blue glass. "I had family and friends shopping at Goodwill for our wedding," she says. "I have quite a collection of cobalt blue glass, and it will probably end up back at Goodwill."

Ashley's wedding planning days may be over, but her shopping trips to Goodwill will continue. "I just love the treasure hunt aspect of Goodwill," she says. "It's a great place to shop for unique items at a bargain price, and Grant loves Goodwill as much as I do." ♦



Love Couldn't Wait

Cristin and Michael grew up in the small town of Ripley, Tennessee. They went to high school together, even graduated the same year, but they never crossed paths in school.

In February 2011, two years after high school, the two met at Victory Baptist Church. Cristin was helping with the youth group, and Michael was the youth pastor. “In June, one of our friends set us up,” she says. “Ever since that night, we haven’t gone a day without talking.”

The couple had been dating six months when Michael popped the question on Christmas Eve. “We had spent the day at his grandparents’ house, and we decided to go out to eat. After our late dinner, we went for a walk. He proposed to me on the stage of the town square’s outdoor amphitheater.”

The couple picked Saturday, December 29, 2012 as their wedding date. It was close to their engagement date and gave them a year to plan.

In early March, Cristin’s mom told her about the Goodwill Wedding Gala. “I thought I would give it a try,” she says. “If nothing else, there would be a fun story to tell.”

Like so many others, Cristin decided to get to the Gala early. After a full day of work and a three hour drive, Cristin arrived at the Rivergate store around 9:30 p.m. She was the seventh bride in line. Her mom, dad and step mom were with her. “I stayed up the whole night, but the eight and a half hour wait went by pretty fast.”

Minutes before the doors opened, Cristin’s aunt and grandmother joined them. “We were all so excited, and when the doors finally



In just one hour, Cristin had found her dress—a Night Moves strapless gown for \$199.99. “I knew I had saved hundreds of dollars.”

opened, it got a bit crazy.”

Cristin and her family went straight to her size and grabbed about 15 gowns. “I tried all of them on, but I saved my favorite for last,” she says. “When I put it on, I knew it was my dress, even before I looked in the mirror.”

In just one hour, Cristin had found her dress—a Night Moves strapless gown for \$199.99. “I knew I had saved hundreds of dollars.”

By June, Cristin had everything planned for her end of the year wedding, but then things changed. “Just two weeks before a beach vacation with my family in July, we decided to elope.”

The couple traded in their large church ceremony in their hometown for a more intimate ceremony at Princess Beach in Destin, Florida. “The wedding was perfect, and so was my dress. I think my husband loved my dress more than I did.”

Two weeks after their July 22 wedding, Cristin got to wear her dress once again at their reception at the Tipton County Museum. The couple celebrated with 100 of their closest friends and family.

Their December wedding and reception were going to be a much larger affair, but Cristin has no regrets about their decision to elope. “We thought it was silly to wait another six months to get married,” she says. “We were ready to make that commitment to one another.”

As for the Wedding Gala, Cristin says the entire experience is one she won’t soon forget. “It has become one of the most memorable moments of my life.” ♦



PHOTOS BY STACY GREEN, FOREVER I DO WEDDINGS

First Bride in Line

It’s not every day that you find a couple who has known each other their entire lives. But that is exactly Diane and Lajuan’s story. “His sister is my childhood best friend, so I’ve known him since I was four years old,” she says.

Diane and Lajuan went on their first date right after Diane graduated from high school. That was 17 years ago, and they’ve been together ever since. In October 2010, Lajuan popped the question, and Diane said yes. The couple decided on a two-year engagement.

In March, Diane was watching television, when she saw a story on the Wedding Gala. “I told my husband that I had to go, and I had to spend the night,” she says.

Diane was determined to find her dream dress at the event. So she and her 9-year-old daughter arrived at the Rivergate store at 7:30 p.m. with chairs and blankets in hand. “I was surprised that we were the first ones in line, but others started arriving about 15 minutes later.”

During the 11 hour wait, Diane’s entourage grew from one to nine. And when the doors opened, Diane and her group raced to the racks. “When they handed me the dress, I knew it was the one before I even tried it on,” she says. “It just felt right.”

Unlike most brides, Diane only tried on one dress. It was her perfect gown at the perfect price—an Eden Bridals gown for \$139.99. It wasn’t Diane’s only purchase that morning. She also found her daughter’s junior bridesmaid’s dress for \$29.99.

On October 6, 2012, the couple said “I do” in front of hundreds of guests at Vultee Church of Christ in Nashville. “We had a large wedding party—19 people including our three children.”

Diane had waited years for her big day, but she wouldn’t change a thing. “Everyone kept telling me that weddings do not go as planned, but our wedding was perfect,” she says. “The service was wonderful, the flowers were beautiful and the food at our reception was delicious.”

So if Diane could do it all over, would she still camp out for 11 hours? “Absolutely,” she says. “The whole experience was exciting, and my gown was so exquisite.” ♦



PHOTO BY BRANDY CROSBY

And when the doors opened, Diane and her team raced to the racks. “When they handed me the dress, I knew it was the one before I even tried it on,” she says. “It just felt right.”

Wedding Gala advice from our brides:

- Know your dress size
- Know what style and color gown you want
- Wear something tight fitting like a body suit or fitted tank top and leggings
- Arrive early
- Bring chairs, blankets and snacks
- Bring plenty of people with you



It's a one day event that takes one year of planning. We're not talking about a wedding, but the Goodwill Wedding Gala. Natisha Moultry, Community Relations Manager, and her team have been hard at work preparing for the 4th annual event. "The planning never stops," says Moultry. "In fact, just two days after last year's Gala, a local bridal store donated more than 130 wedding gowns." By January 2013, area bridal boutiques had donated more than 500 wedding gowns in every size from zero to 28. These designer dresses worth thousands will all be priced under \$400. And just in case a bride falls in love with a dress that's a little too big or too small, alteration experts will be at the Gala to provide an expert opinion. For brides wanting to complete their look, the Gala also features a wide assortment of veils, shoes, jewelry and other accessories. Members of the bridal party can also find a great deal at the Gala. There will be flower girl dresses, dresses for the mother of the bride and groom, and hundreds of bridesmaid dresses. "We have many dresses in the same color and style, so we can accommodate larger bridal parties," says Moultry. "All of these dresses are priced under \$30." If you're ready to say "I do," plan on attending the Goodwill Wedding Gala from 6 a.m. until 10 a.m. on Saturday, March 16. The Goodwill Rivergate store in Madison will transform into a bridal boutique. Refreshments will be provided and brides can sign up for several giveaways. All of the gowns featured here will be for sale at this year's Wedding Gala. You can find even more gowns in our Wedding Gala look book. Just go to giveit2goodwill.org/weddinggala.

GOODWILL *Wedding Gala Look Book* 2013 PREVIEW





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GOODWILL
Wedding Gala

SATURDAY

MARCH 16, 2013

6:00 A.M. TO 10:00 A.M.

RIVERGATE GOODWILL STORE
2101 GALLATIN ROAD
MADISON, TENNESSEE

Designer wedding gowns, bridesmaid dresses, mother-of-the-bride dresses, veils, shoes and jewelry will be sold at deeply discounted prices to benefit Goodwill's mission.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT WWW.GIVEIT2GOODWILL.ORG
OR CALL (615) 346-1601