

Behind-the-scenes look at Designer Dress Days

By SUSAN CONDON LOVE

It's not too early to mark your calendars for Friday, Oct. 20–Thursday, Oct. 24 for some of the best fashion shopping of the season - the annual Designer Dress Days sponsored by the National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW) Cleveland. Held annually to benefit area advocacy and children's programs, Designer Dress Days is the major fundraiser for the group - and a popular treat for Northeast Ohioans looking for a bargain.

To be held at The Mendel Jewish Community Center, 26601 S. Woodland Road, Beachwood, the popular fundraiser includes a preview day with a \$20 admission fee on Friday, Oct. 20 from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Regular hours are on Sunday, Oct. 22 from 10 a.m.-4 p.m., Monday, Oct. 23 from noon-8 p.m., and Tuesday, Oct. 24 from 10 a.m.-8 p.m.

The event is being chaired for the sixth year by NCJW's Michele Kaminsky, with Kelly Markowitz and Jill Braun entering their second year of helping with the fundraiser. The estimated 10,000 donations to the sale come from the 2,000 NCJW members and local retailers, including Lisa Moran, Ltd., Audrey's Sweet Treats, You Two, Art of Cloth, Bonnie's Goutbaud, The Hidden Closet, Free People and Knith's.

"This will be the 49th year for Designer Dress Days," shared Ms. Markowitz. "In 1968, Liz Faub, vice president of NCJW, thought it would be a good idea to invite women to a 'Sherry Hour' and take clothes off their back, which would be resold to women desiring 'fashionable' dresses of that time. The women came to the affair dressed in their finest and left wearing 'paper dresses!' This function was the start of Designer Dress Days."



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She added, "Their goal was to make \$1,000. They actually grossed \$4,000!"

Since that time, Designer Dress Days has become a major fundraiser for NCJW Cleveland Section - as well as a source of designer fashions for thousands of Cleveland women. "The fundraiser benefits NCJW's community service projects, advocacy initiatives and educational programs to better the lives of women, children and families in Northeast Ohio," Ms. Markowitz shared.

Last year's event raised \$212,827, which benefited programs such as Focus on Foster Care, in which the NCJW holds self-esteem-building classes and mentoring activities. "We also have donated knitted clothing items, backpacks and school supplies for other community service projects," according to Ms. Markowitz.

Holding such a large annual event takes a lot of time and effort, according to its organizers. "DDD is a year-round process," said Ms. Markowitz. "Donations are accepted at the NCJW warehouse on Emery in Warrensville Heights all year long. Donations are sorted throughout the year by employees and volunteers. Designer clothing, coats, furs, leathers, purses and jewelry go to the DDD sale. Other clothing items, shoes and accessories go to the Thriftique Showroom." The Thriftique Showroom sells clothing, accessories, plus furniture and other home items all year long. As the items arrive for the big sale, each item is tagged and priced, put on hangers and hung according to designer or type of clothing. Everything is then covered and/or boxed and put into storage until the big day.

It generally takes a minimum of four large trucks to transport DDD items the day before to the sale location. Volunteers then get to work setting everything up.

"The biggest challenge in planning the event is incorporating improvements and changes to continue to increase the number of shoppers and keep up with new trends and labels," said Ms. Markowitz. "We also do not want to forget our loyal customers who have been coming for years by taking out labels that are still pertinent to them."

She added, "There are so many people who help with the planning and organizing of this huge event. Along with Michele, Jill and I, we have DDD committees that help with all the different aspects of the event. We have the volunteers who gather, sort, tag and price the clothes. We also have people who work in communications, store donations volunteer sign up, finance, dressing room, and hospitality (the huge task of feeding the 200-plus volunteers at DDD!)."

"We also have committees for the types of clothing divided up by jewelry, furs, purses and accessories, dressing room, and sweaters. We meet with the different committees about four times a year, checking progress."

When all is said and done, and the last rack of clothing is sold, Ms. Markowitz said she and other NCJW members have one desire: "The biggest thing we hope to accomplish with Designer Dress Days is to raise the most money we can for all of our community service projects, advocacy and educational initiatives."

For more information on Designer Dress Days and the NCJW Cleveland chapter, visit ncjwcleveland.org.



Kelly Markowitz models a dress from the National Council of Jewish Women, Cleveland Section's annual Designer Dress Days.