



Shoppers anticipate this year's clothing swap

A preview of the event

By: Lindsey Tercilla

Cecily Mathis does not want women to fight over jeggings this year.

As far as interesting donations go at a clothing swap, none could top the leather animal-print jeggings, which two women fought over the entire night, Mathis, director of the event said.

One of the women actually followed the other one around, without her knowing, because she was convinced that the jeggings wouldn't fit the woman who picked them up, Mathis said. She even pursued her into the dressing room. After the first woman left the jeggings behind in the dressing room, the second woman scooped them up, she said.

For \$30, you can be VIP at one of the most fun events in West Palm Beach. The Clothing Exchange Project will open its doors 5 minutes earlier for VIPs, who can peruse racks calmly before the rush.

There will be complimentary massages and makeovers for all participants, from 6 to 9 p.m. at The Clothing Exchange Project Saturday, Mathis said.

The event allows women to bring new or used items, including clothing and accessories, to be swapped for 10 items, she said. All leftover clothing is donated to a different local charity each time. Clothes left over from this month's swap will be given to River of Hope Inc, she said.

Mathis said people don't have the money they used to have to shop, so it is a good way to refresh your wardrobe without breaking the bank.

This is the second time the event will be held at the Hawthorn Suites Hotel in West Palm Beach, and the second time that only 10 items for donation will be accepted, Mathis said. In years past, 20 items were accepted because clothes could be dropped off several days before the swap. Items are now accepted the night of the event, which gives volunteers less time to arrange and display clothing before the swap begins.

Past events have attracted over 150 people, but because of the smaller venue this year, Mathis said, around 50-60 people are expected to attend.

While the event is geared toward women, anyone can attend. A woman once brought her husband who carried a full-length mirror for her while she tried on clothes, Mathis said.

According to the project's website, while 10 items is the maximum number of donations allowed, bringing less than 10 is acceptable, and bringing

none is all right, too. Attendees can enjoy shopping around at vendors' booths, and those who do not donate items will be able to purchase them after the exchange has taken place.

Many of the vendors sell jewelry and accessories, but all of them sell women's products.

Racquel Bogle, a past vendor and owner of Queen B's Accessories and Empress Footwear, said shoes and jewelry sold the most at her booth. Both of her companies are online boutiques, she said.

Bogle, 35, participated in the event last year but could not this year because of prior commitments. She plans to be a vendor at the swap later on in the year because it is so well organized.

Bogle said that she prefers the swap to shopping in thrift stores because it allows women to have a night out on the town. Women, she said, do not always remember to take time for themselves.

A night out and an updated wardrobe for a low cost are both important for most women.

"Especially in the times we're living in now," Bogle said, "we have to reload, regroup, and re-launch."

Scarlet Broughman, 49, has attended the swap three times. She said that she is always looking to update her work wardrobe.

Broughman explained that this event is great for those moments when you fall in love with an article of clothing at the store, and then you get it home and you have a "What was I thinking?" moment.

For her it is all about the savings and the social aspect of it. She said you can't beat the deals at the swap, and that she is planning to bring her daughter to the event for a girl's night out.

Former business partner and good friend of Mathis Tricia Williams, 37, stressed The Clothing Exchange Project's dedication to making sure items are thoroughly checked and sorted through. No items with rips, tears or stains are accepted, she said.

"You want it to something your best friend could wear the next day and you would be proud to see her in it," Williams said.

Mathis said she experimented with the idea at a jewelry and clothing-swap party at a former co-worker and friend's house in 2009. She approached Williams with the idea, and in March of that year the two began working on their first event. The first swap took place in June, and the swap has been held about three times a year since.