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Giving away the bride and gown

Local bridal salon to 'issue' 100 free dresses to military brides on Sunday.

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Alicia Robinson, Daily Pilot

COSTA MESA — Military brides-to-be who don't want to wear fatigues on their special day will have the chance to get a high-fashion wedding gown from a local bridal shop on Sunday.

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Partners



Mon Amie in Costa Mesa is holding its second bridal gown giveaway this year for women who are in the military or planning to marry someone in the service. The bride or groom who is in the military must be or have been deployed or stationed overseas after Sept. 11, 2001.

The exclusive bridal salon is offering 100 free dresses and alteration advice from bridal consultants. The gowns are store samples in various styles that would range in cost from hundreds to thousands of dollars if purchased.

"We really don't want anyone to walk out of here empty-handed," event organizer Julie Chalupsky said. "We're trying to help everyone find their dream gown."

As the store's marketing director, Chalupsky dreamed up the free-gown idea and organized the first giveaway in April. A military bride herself, she lived in the area when her husband was stationed on a U.S. Navy ship in San Diego. Late last year they moved to Annapolis, Md., so he could teach at the U.S. Naval Academy there, but she still works for Mon Amie and flew back for Sunday's giveaway.

At the earlier event, 18 women received dresses, but Chalupsky is expecting a larger turnout this weekend because she called area military bases and had promotional help from the Wedding Channel's website.

Glowing reviews came from brides like Jolene Weikel of Santa Ana, who got a gown in April and is ecstatic about it.

"I would never have been able to afford a gown like this," she said of the two-piece ivory gown with a lace-up back and long train. "I really lucked out."

Weikel and her fiancé, Marine Cpl. Todd Richardson, plan to wed Nov. 6. Richardson was so happy he wrote a thank-you letter to the store, and the couple plans to send pictures of the wedding, Weikel said.

Chalupsky said she loves the event and will likely keep it going despite living in Maryland.

"As long as we have the dresses to give and the brides to get married, we'll definitely continue this," Chalupsky said.

The military bride gown giveaway is scheduled from 10:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Sunday at Mon Amie, 355 S. Bristol St., Costa Mesa. For information, call (714) 546-5700.

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