

The Virgin Islands Consortium

'Dress A Girl & Boy' Contest: When Fashion Meets Compassion

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Prom is right around the corner and one lucky lady and a super-lucky guy from St. Croix's Central High School have the chance to win a head-to-toe makeover just in time for their big day -- the dress, the suit, the shoes, the works. And it's all happening thanks to the efforts of Jason Gardner and his First Annual "Dress A Girl & Boy" Contest sponsored by the JG Center of Excellence, Inc., the non-profit arm of Gardner's model management agency, JG Management USVI, LLC.

Gardner said the idea came to him when he launched his non-profit in January and began making a list of initiatives he wanted to be a part of and give back to.



Jason Gardner, founder of JG Center for

Excellence, Inc. and JG Management USVI, LLC

"Central was definitely at the top of my list," he said.

And it made sense that Gardner would start there. He is a graduate of Central High's class of 1992, and Gardner said his alma mater was "very good" to him at the start of his modeling career in the mid-90s.

Last year, he had already began meeting with the school's senior counselor, Ms. Benjamin-Matthews, offering to come in and speak to students interested in pursuing careers in fashion and entertainment.

But, things finally clicked when, just a month ago, the idea came to Gardner to dress two students for their senior prom.

"[Ms. Benjamin-Matthews] thought it was a wonderful idea, so I helped put together some ideas and contacted a few people who could assist me, in terms of make-up and so forth, and everyone was very excited about it," Gardner explained.

And, it is very exciting stuff. Here's why.

The female winner will receive a dress, shoes, make-up artist, hair stylist, accessories, and a corsage. The male winner will receive a suit, shoes, haircut, accessories, and a boutonniere. All finalists will receive a free fashion consultation from Gardner and his team to help them put their best foot forward on prom night, Gardner said.

And when it comes to prom fashion, Gardner offered some tips to ensure attendees, particularly the ladies, look their best. He suggested teen girls tune down the "sexy" and pump up "tasteful, age-appropriate" selections when choosing a dress.

"Styles, in terms of color, cut, style...all of these things are important, but I also notice that the girls of today are dressing very sexy for their age," the businessman said. "I have noticed a lot of very sexy dresses, low backs, especially now, and high slits. I just think that if you're going to do that, it should be age-appropriate and tasteful."

He said his team of stylists will keep those principles in mind when dressing contest winners.

"For this project, we just want to make sure that the girl feels special, and the guy, on their big night. But we want to make sure that they are represented well. They are well dressed, of course, with the fashions of the day. But, the main thing is, we want them to look very, very presentful for their age," Gardner said.

Dressing two teenagers for prom night is no easy feat. With that in mind, Gardner said the project will be a collaborative effort between the winners and his team.

"We're going to make sure that we get their input, as well," he said. "It's not that just because I'm doing this, 'This is what you have to wear' and that's it. We want to get their favorite colors, which is very important, as well as encourage them to give us pictures of styles of dresses and tuxes that they like so we can work together."

In order to fund the project, Gardner says he is seeking sponsorships and conducting fundraisers. Going forward, he said he hopes to expand "Dress A Girl & Boy" to more than one girl and boy, and possibly to other schools.

"We would love to help out a few more [students], and eventually, you never know, it may lead to more schools, as well," he said.

Gardner continued, "But I think that with our first year, we said we would not put too much in our basket. But, I definitely think that next year we would like to have more than one girl and boy."

Of the message he hopes the contest will send to students, Gardner, who made known that he is "very excited" about the effort, said he wants young people to know the community cares about them.

"I think our youth has so many distractions when it comes to peer pressure, and I also want them to understand that there are people out there who care about them, not only their family and close friends, but there are other people out there who may not be close or are related to them that actually care about them to help them reach their dreams," Gardner said.

Contest Rules and Deadline

The 2015 "Dress A Girl & Boy" contest rules are as follows:

- Participants must have a 3.0 GPA and above
- Must attend Prom
- Must be of good moral character
- No disciplinary actions
- Complete student information form
- Submit a one-page typed essay, titled "Why Should I Be Chosen"
- Submit a letter of recommendation
- Submit a headshot and full-length photo

Completed packages should be submitted to Ms. Benjamin-Matthews at Central High School or emailed to Jason Gardener at info@jgmanagementusvi.com on or before Monday, March 2, 2015. Winners will be announced at the school at the end of March.

JG Management USVI, LLC focuses on scouting males and females ages five and up with or without modeling experience. The JG Center of Excellence, Inc. offers training, development and placement for models, actors, singers and dancers worldwide.

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