



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

July 18, 2025

FAYETTE COUNTY WOMEN GIVE SPECIAL NEEDS COMMUNITY 'WICKED' GOOD TIME

Uniontown, PA – People with special needs often miss out on events and opportunities that others get to enjoy, including prom. Various barriers can make it difficult, even impossible, for them to enjoy traditional events. But for the last several years, a group of Fayette County women has been changing that.

Kelly Linko, Rita Rosensteel and Glenda McLaughlin have worked together to put on the Under the Stars special needs prom “for the last seven or eight years,” Linko said. She said the three coordinated the first event just before the COVID-19 pandemic hit, then had to cancel the proms in 2020 and 2021 before bringing it back in 2022.

This year’s event was held July 12 at Connellsville Township fire hall, and the theme was the Broadway show “Wicked.” Rosensteel said the venue was decorated in “a beautiful combination of green and hot pink,” with 400 pink and green Mylar balloons, “Wicked” backdrops and the event’s usual red carpet.

Linko and Rosensteel said the idea to host a special needs prom came about because all three women work with people with special needs or have special needs individuals in their families. Linko said her brother and Rosensteel’s daughter have special needs.

“I have a special needs child, Jamie, who is 36 years old. Glenda is Jamie’s caregiver, and Kelly is a friend of ours,” Rosensteel said. “We all just got to talking one day about doing a prom for these individuals and started looking for donations from there.”

Linko said the three wanted to “do something fun because they don’t get the same recognition as a regular school student does with prom.”

She said it could be that the special needs person attends a school that doesn’t hold prom, or that it would be too challenging for them to attend the event at a mainstream high school.

“They don’t understand why they can’t go,” she said.

Linko and Rosensteel said the event has grown by leaps and bounds since its resurrection in 2022 – so much so that they’ve twice had to find larger venues.

“We had our first prom on the second floor of the Moose Lodge in Connellsville. It was small, but we all had fun,” Rosensteel said.

Linko said there were only 73 participants at that event, but attendance is now up to between 150 and 200 people, “and that’s not counting the caregivers.”

After its first year at Connellsville Moose, the event moved to New Haven Hose social hall in Connellsville, then to Connellsville Township fire hall. If the event outgrows that location, Linko said she is “looking at Lakeview because Lakeview is pretty big.”

Linko said the special needs prom includes hors d’oeuvres and a sit-down dinner, as well as snacks like chips and cookies.

“Last year, the Wedding Cookie Table online helped us out. We had a lot of cookies,” she said.

She said the special needs prom is funded largely by donations from businesses and individuals. Some of the event’s sponsors include Dr. Richard and Carol Tiberio, Kiwanis Club of Uniontown, Fayette County Behavioral Health, Frontier, Fayette Resources, Laurel House Inc., Twin Trees, ARC of Fayette County, Family Ties, the Connellsville Lions Club, and Eugene Cook.

“There were some other individuals, too many to name,” Linko said.

She said the event requires a great deal of work and planning, but it’s worth the effort.

“We have a lot of aches and pains in our bodies after, but we get a lot of satisfaction from it,” she said. “We like to see the joy on their faces. I know I do.”

As does Rosensteel.

“I absolutely love seeing these individuals have fun,” she said. “It melts my heart when they run up to show me their new outfit or dress. I feel like a proud mama! They’re so proud of how good they look for the night, showing off their new nails, their hair and their dress. The men show me their tie, haircut, new shoes ... and they’re just so proud. They feel so good about themselves. They talk about this event for months.”

To learn more about Fayette County, visit www.fayettecountypa.org.

###

This communication is part of the Fayette County PR Initiative, which is funded through the Fayette County Local Share Account (LSA) and Hotel Tax Grants in cooperation with the Fayette County Board of Commissioners, Fayette Chamber of Commerce, The Redevelopment Authority of the County of Fayette, The Redstone Foundation and other partners. This funding has been designated for the continued promotion and marketing of Fayette County, PA.

For more information, contact Kristi Kassimer Harper, Public Relations Specialist, at 724-437-4571, kkassimer@fayettecountypa.info or Jamie Rankin, Journalist, at 724-437-4571, jamierankin13@gmail.com.