

Their 'Night to Shine'

Tim Tebow Foundation puts on proms here, nationwide for those with special needs



"I can't wait to dance," said Colleen Kelly, who walks down the red carpet Friday night with her boyfriend Joe Hagan during the Night to Shine dance at South County Baptist Church.



"I'll remember this night for a long time," said Dawn Lutz-Dreyer (left) who dances with her buddy Anne Knoll.

BY ASHLEY LISENBY
St. Louis Post-Dispatch

ST. LOUIS COUNTY • Decked out in a navy blue knee-length dress accented with shimmering fabric across the top, Jessica Perry, 32, sat down in a chair in front of a stylist to get her curls touched up before heading over to photo shoot with her boyfriend.

Perry smiled and laughed infectiously as she got dolled up and photographed, but the anticipation was building for one thing: dancing.

With her hands held high above her head, Perry later twirled to an instrumental version of Michael Jackson's "Billie Jean." Nearby a man mimicked

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PHOTOS BY LAURIE SKRIVAN • lskrivan@post-dispatch.com

'We want them to know we care about them'



Jessica Perry dances with her boyfriend, Jimmy Simmons, during the Night to Shine dance on Friday at South County Baptist Church.



With some encouragement from DJ Neal Hopson, Sydney Robison belts out "I Will Remember You" by Sarah McLachlan on Friday during the Night to Shine dance. "I like the dancing, the limo and singing," Robison said.

PHOTOS BY LAURIE SKRIVAN • lskrivan@post-dispatch.com

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the rhythmic moves of the late pop singer, drawing the attention of several on-lookers.

For those two and several dozen other people, the Night to Shine dance at South County Baptist Church on Friday night was a special outing.

The event was one of many around the country sponsored by the Tim Tebow Foundation to celebrate people with special needs.

Congregants and private donors raised about \$14,000 for the event at South County Baptist, 12095 Tesson Ferry Road, said church senior pastor John Childers.

Attendees got hair and makeup styling, shoe-shines, professional photos and limousine rides.

"Our theme for the year is care for the community intentionally," Childers said — meaning, he said, "demonstrate God's love in a practical way and affirming the value of life." He choked back tears thinking of the moment when each promgoer would be crowned queen or king. More than 100



Antoine Edwards spent most of the evening on the dance floor at the Night to Shine dance on Friday. The event was one of many around the country sponsored by the Tim Tebow Foundation for people with special needs.



Lance Acey dances with Kristin Dunkelberger on Friday night at the Night to Shine dance. Congregants and private donors raised about \$14,000 for the event.

people registered for the event, not including volunteers and caregivers who accompanied many of the attendees.

"Every one of them is precious in God's sight and ours," Childers said.

Event coordinator and church leader Phil Spears echoed that sentiment.

"Ultimately, we want them to know we care about them," Spears said. "Some others get pushed

to the side. We want to let them know they're as valuable as anyone else."

St. Louis County Councilman Ernie Trakas joined many spectators cheering for promgoers as they strutted down a red carpet into the church gymnasium.

Last Tuesday the council approved a resolution proposed by Trakas that designated Feb. 10 as "Night to Shine Day" in

the county.

That is the name for similar events around the country coordinated by the Tim Tebow Foundation, which was started by the former NFL quarterback and current New York Mets outfielder.

While it was Perry's first Night to Shine dance, she and others at the event had attended the Pujols Family Foundation Down syndrome prom in years

past. That foundation was started by former St. Louis Cardinals first baseman Albert Pujols.

At Friday's event, Creve Coeur resident Daniel Ridings, 41, and his aide, Tyson Tyrrell, took a break from their stint on the dance floor to get some punch, a creamy sherbet float with pineapples.

Though he uses a wheelchair, Ridings loves to dance, Tyrrell said.

"He likes to dance with girls," Tyrrell said of Ridings. "He's a babe magnet." Tyrrell said he joked before heading to the dance that Ridings might find a girlfriend there.

That may or may not have happened. Ridings seemed to hit it off with a few fellow prom attendees on the dance floor.

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Sharing a vision

Leading BBF church affiliates with MBC, SBC

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SPRINGFIELD - The shared vision of transforming lives and communities with the gospel has led High Street Baptist Church here, a historically independent church whose pastor serves as president of the Baptist Bible Fellowship International (BBFI), to affiliate with the Missouri Baptist Convention and the

Southern Baptist Convention.

"We didn't feel like we needed to sustain an artificial separation from the people in this town and state that are so much like us in participating in the same mission," said Eddie Lyons, pastor of High Street, Springfield, for 15 years and current president of the



Lyons

BBFI. "We have the same heart, the same calling."

With the help and counsel of Michael Haynes, Director of Missions for the Greene County Baptist Association, Lyons and his congregation took their first steps toward affiliation early last year; later in the year, they voted to affiliate and submitted their paperwork to the conventions.

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South County hosts 'Night to Shine'

Church partners with Tebow Foundation

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ST. LOUIS - It's not unusual for churches to roll out a figurative red carpet, but South County Baptist Church here literally rolled out the red carpet for 107 "VIP guests" Feb. 10, complete with "papparazzi."

The church also hosted limo rides, hair and makeup stations, corsages and boutonnières, shoe shines, professional photography, dinner, a DJ, karaoke and a dance as part of Night to Shine, a partnership between the Tim Tebow Foundation and 375 churches worldwide to provide an

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Spears

Missouri's Annie Armstrong goal set at \$2 million

BY STAFF

JEFFERSON CITY - Missouri Baptists have set a goal for the 2017 Annie Armstrong Easter Offering at \$2 million.

Working toward the same goal in

SEE INSIDE

Celebrating 50 years



ST. LOUIS - Elise Pulley, right, was one of 100 volunteers who buddied up with special needs "VIPs" like Diane during Night to Shine at South County Baptist Church here.



Pathway photos by Brian Koonce

ST. LOUIS - Ed Moncada, a member of South County Baptist Church and an MBC collegiate missionary, poses with his buddy for the night, Brandon, and Brandon's mother. Brandon was one of more than 100 special needs "VIPs" to attend Night to Shine at the church.

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"unforgettable prom night experience, centered on God's love," for people with special needs ages 14 and older.

Phil Spears, minister of administration and education at South County, helped coordinate nearly 100 volunteers from the church who helped the night go off without a hitch.

"God loves us regardless of our abilities," he said. "We wanted each of these people here tonight to know that God loves them and we love them. We want each family to have a fun night that

they won't forget, but we also want them to know the love of Christ as well.

As part of Night to Shine, each special needs "VIP" was paired with a "buddy" from the church to guide and usher them through the evening. Family were welcome to take part in the festivities with their VIP, but they also had a break room where they could enjoy the evening on their own while the church took care of the rest. By the time all the guests, their families and

volunteers arrived, the church was full.

The Tim Tebow Foundation, which bears the name of Heisman Trophy winning quarterback and outspoken evangelical Christian, Tim Tebow, helped the church coordinate with local businesses to ensure that each guest at South County got a chance at professional hair and makeup, as well as a catered buffet and limo rides. "We had five different restaurants and four or five salons that heard about it

and wanted to know how they could get involved," Spears said.

More than a year ago, Spears, who follows Tebow on Twitter, saw a tweet about Night to Shine, and saw it as an opportunity the church had to grab. They were too late for last year's Night to Shine, but they applied to the Foundation and have been planning for this year's event since then.

Spears said he believes the church will absolutely host Night to Shine again in the future. ■

