

# Job search leads to free makeover for unemployed mom



Antoinette Johnson, Destiny Taylor of Rockford and Byron Allen of Gary are all Midwest winners of a program designed to help the unemployed find work.

**By Denise Moran**

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Antoinette Johnson, 26, of Elgin recently visited Macy's in Spring Hill Mall and received free advice on how to dress for success.

She was also given two new outfits and two pairs of shoes.

Johnson, Destiny Taylor of Rockford and Byron Allen of Gary are all Midwest winners of a program designed to help the unemployed find work.

The program is being run by Fifth Third, "NextJob" Employment Assistance Program and "WhatRUWearing," a fashion and style company based in Illinois, according to Jodi Reeves of Fifth Third Bank..

Since 2004, Fifth Third has been sending its Financial Empowerment Mobile, or Fifth Third "eBus," across the country to help meet the financial needs of underserved populations through its Lives Improved through Financial Empowerment (L.I.F.E.) programs.

The cities recently visited by the eBus were Elgin and Rockford in Illinois and Gary in Indiana.

Johnson lives in Buena Vista Apartments in Elgin with her two children: Naomi, 5, and Cameron, 2. Reeves said that Fifth Third recently gave a loan to Buena Vista in order to rehab the apartment complex.

Johnson lost her job May 26. Following the advice of her landlord, she attended a career fair that was held on Wednesday, May 27, at the Gail Borden Public Library.

"There were over 100 people there," Johnson said.

She boarded the eBus at the library and signed up for the NextJob employment assistance program. She also entered a contest and won a style makeover.

On Tuesday, Johnson came to Macy's in Spring Hill Mall and met Reeves; Farissa Knov, founder and president of WhatRUWearing, and Lauren Gilliam, WhatRUWearing public relations manager.

Johnson said she usually wears size 12. Knov showed her that, depending on the material, a size 10 sometimes offered Johnson a better fit than her regular size.

"A smaller size covers areas better when it is a stretchy, forgiving fabric," Knov said. "The material falls where it should, and the waist is where it should be. There is nothing draping at the neckline or pulling at the back."

Johnson tried on another size 10 dress that was made of a stiffer material.

"It fits you," Knov commented, "but it's too tight for a work environment."

Johnson added a blazer over the dress.

"Blazers should be short at the waist," Knov said. "They don't necessarily need to be buttoned. Add a blazer in order to add structure, but if you look better without one, don't wear one."

Knov suggested a belt in order to add an additional element to Johnson's outfit.

"Unless a dress is made of plain material, choose a belt with no embellishment so it won't compete with the pattern of the dress," Knov said. "A black belt on a black dress is classic."

Knov said that a pair of black, flat-heeled shoes work well with every outfit. She also said that women should always keep a pair of classic black pumps available.

"First Lady Michelle Obama can pull off wearing big heels," Knov said, "but most women should wear mid-level heels. Buy clothes and shoes that make you feel beautiful and remind you of what you were like before you had kids."

Knov said women should look for unique outfits and remember that the cut is more important than the pattern.

"Take yourself out of your comfort zone and learn what looks good on you."

Johnson was given two of the six dresses she tried on along with two new pairs of shoes.

"I enjoyed the experience," Johnson said. "I tried on and really liked some outfits that I normally would not have picked out."

In addition to now having new clothes to wear for interviews, Johnson said the NextJob Training Tool Kit improved her resume by utilizing key words. The assistance program offers free one-on-one coaching and job search tools.

Johnson has work experience in both retail and banking. She plans to seek employment in either real estate, customer service or an office.

"This experience has opened my eyes," Johnson said. "It has been a blessing."

*Denise Moran is a freelance reporter for the Courier-News.*

