



Fed up with skinny standards, Auburn High School student, model starts her own fashion show



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As a model, Auburn High School student Ally Berry had enough of being told how to look.

To celebrate her own belief — that beauty comes in all shades, shapes and sizes — Berry organized The Self-Esteem Runway Show, a fashion fundraiser taking place Sunday at Auburn Public Theater.

The show benefits Cayuga/Seneca Community Action Agency's Domestic Violence Intervention Program and the Sexual Assault Victims Advocate Resource of Cayuga County. Representatives of each organization will answer questions at the event, and an after-party will feature refreshments and live music.

I had a chance to speak with Berry about where the idea for The Self-Esteem Runway Show came from, the challenge of organizing it and what she hopes to accomplish with it.

Q. Where did you get the idea for this show?

A. I've always known Carey (Eidel, APT's executive director), and knew he'd be more than happy to help out. For the whole idea, I've done modeling since I was 13 or 14 and done fashion shows, and never had a problem concerning weight until I went to Mercedes-Benz Fashion Week in Buffalo. There was one designer who asked if I was a size 2 and I said size 4, and he said I needed to be 2 to fit into something. I couldn't get the zipper up over my hips. It wasn't fat, it was bone. And they yelled at me. I'm constantly looking through magazines and they're making it seem like tiny skinny girls are what's beautiful. And I don't want people thinking you have to be a size 0 or 2, or even 4 to be pretty.

Q. So when did you start working on it?

A. About last year — I already knew some designers from other shows, and people in hair and makeup. I figured I could get enough people to make the show happen if possible.

It was really hard getting corporate sponsors, because we weren't a nonprofit group. We probably should have filed, considering we're supporting domestic violence. It was hard finding a band for the after-party. Some people flaked on us here and there. There's

always some unreliable people you don't realize, and you have to prepare for anything unexpected.

Q. Were there ever any moments when you doubted you'd be able to put the show on?

A. Yeah, especially when we weren't getting enough money. We had to drive to Syracuse a lot, so gas money was piling up, and my mom's a single parent. It was really difficult to get anyone to donate almost anything. If you know people, you can get it done. Unfortunately, that's the way it is.

Q. What about the models and the clothing — how did that come together?

A. It was much easier than I thought. I would have liked to have more designers, but life issues get in the way. The casting call went well — I thought more people would show up, but it wasn't that bad. I got more models from talking to people online. I have friends who are real models coming to do the show — it's not all inexperienced models — so they can help each other out.

Q. Being an Auburn High School student, did you use that connection to organize the show at all? Or did you do it independently?

A. It was mostly independent. I put up a few posters around the high school, but only one person told me they saw it there. Most of it was through online connections. I put up posters at Hunter's and Daut's and Moro's, places downtown near the theater. That and talking to people online is what got people to come to the casting.

Q. Is there a specific look or theme to the show?

A. It's not very specific. All I want is for them to look beautiful. It's not a certain style; I just want everyone to look as good as they can so they can feel better about themselves. To me, that's the theme of the show.

Q. Will there be any parts of the show that drive home that message of yours?

A. I'm definitely going to talk to people at the show, and Carey — I do believe he's going to have an introductory presentation before the show starts to make sure people know about me and where the idea came from, and what this is all about.

Q. And where did the idea come from to donate the money to the Domestic Violence Intervention Program and SAVAR?

A. Domestic violence contributes to low self-esteem, I think, so I thought it'd be a great idea. If I donate to them, then the cause would be more distributed. It would be money to the programs, and also contribute to more self-esteem.

If you go.

WHAT: Self-Esteem Runway Show

WHEN: 6 p.m. Sunday, June 30

WHERE: Auburn Public Theater, 8 Exchange St., Auburn

COST: Tickets \$15; proceeds support the Cayuga/Seneca Community Action Agency's Domestic Violence Intervention Program and the Sexual Assault Victims Advocate Resource

INFO: Call 253-6669 or visit www.auburnpublictheater.org