

# TIMES RECORD

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## WestArk Church of Christ to host Night to Shine

By Scott Smith / Times Record / [ssmith@swtimes.com](mailto:ssmith@swtimes.com)

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Dancing, karaoke sessions, limousine rides, red-carpet entrances and a catered dinner will create smiles and lifetime memories for more than 100 individuals next month in Fort Smith.

WestArk Church of Christ will be one of 350 congregations from across the world to host the free Night to Shine event at 6 p.m. Feb. 10 at the church, 900 N. Waldron Road. The faith-based, prom-style activity will pay honor to as many as 150 individuals who are 14 and older with special needs, said Jordon Brown, one of the event's organizers.

"Those special needs can be physical or mental needs," he said. "Anyone with special needs can come in and join us for this special event."

A dance floor and a music-loving disc jockey will be provided, as will hair and makeup stations, shoeshine stations, karaoke sessions, games, corsages and boutonnieres, large cheering sections and friendly paparazzi, Brown said. When guests exit the limo near the dance floor, they will be greeted by caregivers, event organizers and other individuals, he said.

"The guests' caregivers can drop their loved ones off at this event, or they can come in and watch movies and play games with other caregivers," Brown said. "The caregivers can get to know each other, because we are trying to enhance the caregiver community here in Fort Smith. We know that community is here, and we want to show that they can lean on each other and they can lean on our congregation members for any help they need."

WestArk Church of Christ is the third Arkansas church to host Night to Shine and will be the only Fort Smith church to host this year, he said. Guests and volunteers alike will experience a "loving, fun" evening that they will remember for the rest of their lives, Brown said.

"The gentlemen will get a crown and the ladies will get a tiara, and everyone will be a king or queen for the ball," he said. "The guests each will have a buddy to escort them, like a prom date, and there will be 2 to 2 1/2 hours of dancing the night away or singing karaoke.

"That buddy can dance with them and cheer them on with they are singing karaoke, and there will be lots of cheering sections to walk with them and help them," he added.

Brown's wife, Melissa Brown, is another event organizer and anticipates that Night to Shine will be a social success.

"I think this is an opportunity to show love to some people who might not be loved by many on a daily basis," she said. "Watching the videos of the previous Night to Shine events and seeing the happiness and love displayed by the people there, that just made me feel like we needed to do this in our area."

Those wishing to register a guest or to volunteer can call 806-7583 or visit

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"We're telling people that the sooner they register, the better," Jordon Brown said. "Central Christian Church did a similar activity last year, and they have a whole closet of men's and women's formal wear that they've offered us.

"The sooner people register for Night to Shine, the easier we can get them clothes and keep the communication happening between us, the guests and the volunteers," he added. "But I will say that there probably will be some people who show up that night and want to be a part of this, and that will be fine. We certainly won't turn anyone away."

An \$8,500 grant from the Tim Tebow Foundation was awarded to WestArk Church of Christ to help cover the costs for Night to Shine, he said. WestArk Church of Christ members and other supporters have vowed to cover the remaining costs to help ensure that the event is free for guests, caregivers and volunteers, Jordon Brown said.

"The Tim Tebow Foundation gave us that grant; it's our first time to host this, and that was very kind of the foundation," he said.

The music heard on the dance floor and during the karaoke sessions will touch upon numerous styles, Jordon Brown said.

"It all will be clean, of course," he said of the music. "You'll hear 'The Chicken Dance,' 'YMCA' and all the fun dance music."

Much of the Browns' inspiration to host the event stemmed from their recent interactions with individuals from the Arc for the River Valley.

"My wife and I went to this Christian party with the Arc for the River Valley, and let me tell you something: these kids love to dance," Jordon Brown said. "We want to see that at Night to Shine, because we are trying to step up and minister to these people — these special, wonderful people."

One of Meredith Brown's goals is to see Night to Shine become an annual event in Fort Smith.

"This will be an unforgettable prom experience," she said. "We'd like this to be a community effort. We would like other churches to help us with this."

For some of the Night to Shine's guests, it will be their first time to be honored in a public setting, Jordon Brown said.

"We want to lift up these special guests and let them know that not only does God love them, but we love them and other people love them, too," he said. "Hopefully, they will feel that people appreciate them, and I hope that I will be overwhelmed by the great things that will happen at our Night to Shine."

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