

Boutique owner helps Derby teen make special memory

By Patricia Villers

DERBY - Derby High School student Leilannie Santana has learned hard work and determination pay rewards.

Leilannie, 17, has a smile that lights up a room.

Although she has an autism diagnosis, she is “high-functioning,” her mother, Lucy Feliciano, said in an interview last week.

“She tries her best at everything,” Feliciano said proudly. She said when her daughter was very young and before she was diagnosed she knew she was different, and special.



Feliciano said she always pushed her daughter to work hard and doctors have said that is how Leilannie has had so much success.

It was Leilannie’s dream to attend prom with her classmates, and thanks to Shelton resident Agathe Ngo Likoba, Leilannie did just that.

Likoba is a fashion designer who owns Likoba, a high-end, Parisian-style boutique at 25 Elizabeth St. that opened last year.

She carries a variety of elegant jumpsuits she designed, in addition to luxury cosmetics and accessories.

Likoba said her dream was to give a deserving, hard-working Derby High School student the opportunity to attend prom. She called the school and was immediately referred to Leilannie, an honor roll student in the Class of 2020.



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Leilannie said when she learned she had been selected to receive a gown and all the accessories to be prom ready, she felt “really good.”

“The school [staff] spoke highly of you,” Likoba told Leilannie. “I was so touched by her,” she said.



Likoba called Leilannie’s story inspiring. She wanted to make sure Leilannie felt special about herself.

A friend of Likoba, Ansonia resident David McDermott, drove Leilannie to the prom held at Fantasia in North Haven.

McDermott said when Leilannie arrived several of her friends greeted her and he could see she was smiling and happy to be there. “I was happy to [bring her],” he said. “It made me feel good.”

Likoba commissioned a friend, Dominique Lee, owner of Envision Beauty salon in Milford, to work on Leilannie’s hair and makeup for the big day.

“She was so precious, so excited,” Lee said about Leilannie. “She is such a good girl.”

And after she graduates from Derby High School? Leilannie said she hopes to pursue a career in graphic design.



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