

Thrift store gets face lift

By DENA HARRIS
Associate Editor

WAUPUN – Seven years ago a lumber yard was transformed into a thrift store, Bargains Galore. Now another transformation is taking place as the thrift store expands to accommodate customers and volunteers.

The ground breaking ceremony was held last Saturday, April 19. About 250 people attended to cheer on the volunteers and committee members.

Announced during the ground breaking ceremony, Bargains Galore has raised \$1.5 million for the CWC schools.

Improvements to the store will include:

- An 1,800-square-foot addition to the warehouse
- The warehouse reinsulated

- Mezzanine with stairs and electric lift added to warehouse
- Some walls throughout the building removed to open the retail area

- New floors poured throughout the building
- New entrance at the front of the building

- Electricity and lighting rewired throughout the building
- Whole store remodeled
- East side of building will have a new wall

- Climate control included throughout building
- New restrooms with baby changing stations
- Expanded men and women's clothing departments

- Wider aisles with ramps eliminated
- Six larger fitting rooms
- Shopping carts
- A Kid's Zone
- Additional merchandise
- Outdoor lawn and garden section
- Tool shed
- Loading zone for furniture pick-up
- Sitting area with vending machines
- Spacious checkout area
- Covered drive-thru drop-off

The thrift store will remain open during regular business hours throughout most of the construction.

"The goal is to be closed as little as possible," Pete Montsma, superintendent of the project, said at the ground breaking ceremony. Montsma has construction experience and is retired.

The renovation project depends on the volunteers to complete the work. A list of volunteers was collected and will be called a week in advance of when they are needed. Other than mechanical work, the project will be done by volunteers. Because the project

is so dependent upon volunteers and the weather, an approximate completion date of the project cannot be determined until progress is made.

The thrift store was first created as a fundraiser for the Central Wisconsin Christian School in Waupun. The store opened in August of 2001 as an option to pay for tuition for families attending the school. It started with volunteer management and all donated merchandise.

"We soon found out that the store was doing well," co-manager Brenda Hofman said. "The store was well-received in the community and developed quickly."

The store has kept the same schedule, open Thursday 10 a.m. to 8 p.m., Friday and Saturday 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

According to co-manager Melissa Wierenga, the store only sells quality merchandise. They accept donations during the same hours the store is open. During the week volunteers inventory the merchandise and put it out for display.

"Now it's huge," Wierenga said. "It's the talk of the town. It's become a big operation."

"Over the years we've been feeling the growing pains," Hofman said.



Neighbors Staff/Dena Harris

Jade Regnerus and Brenda Hofman provoke the crowd of about 250 people to cheer during the ground breaking ceremony April 19 at Bargains Galore Thrift Store.

"That's what led us to pursue Project Renovate. We've been planning it over the last year and it has now come full circle."

The renovation will be beneficial to both the customers and volunteers.

"We want to provide a better shopping experience," Hofman said. "And the renovation will affect the staff by improving the working conditions. Because it's volunteer-run, we need to have a nice, comfortable place for them to work."

The operation has about 200 volunteers with about 40 helping regularly every week.

"The volunteers do love it," Wierenga said. "They take pride in their work. It has been a good fit for people to use their talents."

The three managers helped plan the renovation project. Wierenga started as a volunteer when the store first began. She later became a volunteer department manager and assistant manager before her current co-manager position.

Hofman was also a volunteer since the beginning and became a manager in 2002. Co-manager Jade Regnerus volunteered at the store before being moved to a managerial

position in January 2007.

"The business has changed a lot in the 6 1/2 years we've been in physical business," Wierenga said. "The store originally put stuff out and we'd see how it'd go. Now there a method to our madness."

The store has been a member of the National Association of Resale and Thrift Shop stores for four years.

"It's a good resource for us," Hofman said. "It helped clarify a lot. None of us have a retail background, so we were thrilled to find a group to talk to throughout the challenges we go through."

Over the years the store provided free merchandise to victims of fires or other catastrophes. They also hold a Community Day once a year where proceeds of one day's sales go to a community organization.

"People see it's making a difference for the community," Hofman said.

According to Wierenga, thrift stores usually only last five years.

"It's been a blessing that we've been as successful as we have in our seven years," Wierenga said.

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Steve Soodsma of Excel Engineering, committee chairman Dan Scheuers, Steve Westra of W.D.S. Construction Inc., project superintendent Pete Montsma, Jon Clark of Markesan State Bank, store co-manager Melissa Wierenga, store co-manager Brenda Hofman, store co-manager Jade Regnerus, Ben Westra of W.D.S. Construction, CWC Advancement Director Gregg Zonnfeld and alderman Rohn Bishop are the core group in charge of the renovation project at Bargains Galore. They broke the ground first at the April 19 ceremony.

Saturday, May 24, 2008

WCI & Bargains Galore Launch "Dress for Success" Program

WAUPUN—With the help of Bargains Galore Thrift Store, Waupun Correctional Institution has put an end to the long standing practice of releasing inmates into the community wearing their "prison green's" (the standard prison uniform) if no other clothing options were available. This practice did not match with the Department of Correction's recent Re-Entry Initiative, which focuses on better preparation of inmates for release. Inmates being better prepared for release means benefits for Wisconsin communities, as it can lead to lower recidivism rates and ultimately, safer communities. To transition out of prison successfully requires a bridge to the community. Partnerships between the Institutions, Parole Agents, and community resources is one way to build these bridges and are vital to a successful "Re-entry" into the community.

Waupun Correctional Institution approached Bargains Galore approximately two months ago to propose the idea of beginning a "clothing closet" at the Institution that would stock men's clothing, shoes and outerwear. As a result of the partnership, titled "Dress for Success," men released from prison will be able to have a better start for returning to their community. Initial impressions are important for these men. They will be making their initial impression on their Parole Agent and prospective employers. The partnership will provide one set of clothing, shoes and outerwear to each inmate who is unable to purchase these items for themselves and/or have no one on the outside who can assist them in obtaining clothing for release.

This year, Waupun Correctional Institution is currently projecting approximately 120 inmates who will be released back to their communities



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WCI and Bargains Galore are happy to have teamed up for the launch of "Dress for Success," giving inmates in need a better start.

directly from the Institution.

Bargains Galore is a faith-based, non-profit, donation-only thrift store located at 810 W. Main St. in Waupun. The mission of

Bargains Galore is to raise funds for the area Christian Schools and make a difference in the community. This partnership with WCI is another example of how the store

aims to carry out their mission. Since opening in 2001, Bargains Galore prides itself in giving back to the community and making a difference.