

# Thrift shop serves the island community and beyond

By Michaela Kennedy

Every conceivable item, from sofas to shoes, can be found for a bargain at St. Matthew's Thrift Shop on Narragansett Avenue. The shop is open, for shopping or donating, on Tuesday and Saturday mornings from 9:30 to 11:30 a.m. The parking lot fills up quickly, and leashed dogs wait expectantly outside the door.

"Sometimes people wait in line to come in," said Deborah Brayton, a volunteer for the last three years. Year-round regulars, as well as summer visitors return again and again to find designer clothes, books, toys, or one-of-a-kind specialty items. Many people show up at the door with trunkfuls of possessions they are ready to pass on to needy recipients. "It's a fun place," added Brayton. "We find out what people like and offer it to them."

The thrift shop is so much fun that Brayton talked her mother, Shirley St. Germaine, into helping. "My daughter got me excited about it," St. Germaine laughed.

Barbara Kosacz comes home to Jamestown every summer from Palo Alto, Cal., with three daughters, Addie, Maggie and Ramona, in tow. As the girls browsed with big smiles, Kosacz admitted the thrift shop was a memorable place to visit. Addie, 11, and Maggie, 8, both found favorite dolls the previous year, and brought them back to California. "I love the food," kidded Ramona, also 8, who held



Susan Warszawski, Mary Jawor, Deborah Brayton and Shirley St. Germaine are some of the volunteers who staff the Thrift Shop at St. Matthew's Church.

Photo by Michaela Kennedy

up some plastic grapes to her open mouth.

Native islander Mary Jawor, acting cashier, noted the "enormous amount of charitable work," the volunteers do. She pointed out a free box for children to rummage through, and also one for the adults. As Jawor explained the system, a little blonde-headed girl approached the front desk with an embroidered red jacket. "One dollar, please," asked Jawor. The girl paid without a word, and walked away with her new treasure clutched to her chest.

Jawor noted the program, well over 20 years in running, accepts everything. Whatever is not picked

up, the volunteers send to the Salvation Army or other goodwill agencies. "Strong men come and take it for us," she added.

The basement rooms are organized, with rooms for clothes, household goods, and appliances. A storage room contained seasonal items. A wall was covered with an extensive collection of books, and another held toys. She stressed that all electrical items are checked. If they don't work, they are not accepted. "We receive beautiful things. It's amazing what people give up," she said.

Indeed, people in the community do give many things, with bags often lined up outside before the shop opens. The workers encourage givers to donate while the co-

op is open, however, to avoid items getting ruined in case of rain. "We make use of everything," said Jawor.

Peter Hoagland, one of the organizers, noted that the primary function of the thrift shop is stepping beyond the church, with the intention of putting donations to the best use. "We're helping people who have been burned out, helping teachers with students who need pencils, globes, maps," he said.

He said volunteers notice re-

peat customers who buy things in volume. One woman who went to the thrift shop had an afternoon basketball team at the YMCA. The helpers asked her about her needs, and gave her T-shirts, socks and sneakers. "We find out what people need and give it to them," he said.

"People looking for assistance have revealed their connections abroad, as in Iraq, Central America and Russia, where many donations are sent," Hoagland continued. Sponsors of international military personnel at the War College in Newport come to Jamestown to find clothing for personnel in need. Bridges, a home for challenged adults in Westerly, receives duplicates or things for which St. Matthew's does not have a home. "We are always looking for new places to make donations," he added.

Kevin Lloyd, minister at St. Matthews, admired the work he has seen at the parish since arriving here a year and a half ago. "They've done a great job. It's a nice outreach ministry for us," he said. Lloyd noticed many people in the area who make good use of the shop, and a group of helpers who are not all parishioners. "We have a committed group. It's an ecumenical mix," he commented, adding, "It also provides us with a little bit of extra income for the church."



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