

The News-Herald

The Voice of Downriver

Business

SOUTHGATE: Tried & True Too Thrift Store supports people with disabilities

Published: Sunday, June 05, 2011

By Lisa Vidaurri-Bowling

SOUTHGATE — The launching of a new business, Tried & True Too Thrift Store, is a step in supporting people with disabilities to become fully integrated into their communities.



Located at 15431 Dix-Toledo, the thrift store is owned and operated by Services To Enhance Potential, also known as STEP, a private, nonprofit agency that supports people with disabilities. Opened in April, this is the second store managed by the agency.

Tried & True Thrift Store, 35004 Michigan Ave., Wayne, was opened in June 2007.

“People need meaningful activities, work and income to realize this,” said David Bourque, STEP resource center director. “We were successful in our Wayne operation in providing work and other opportunities

to a number of individuals with various disabilities, and therefore expanded operations to better serve our Downriver communities.

“Other nonprofits operate thrift stores to support their services. STEP goes a step further by employing the people they support. Individuals with disabilities man all phases of the retail operation: accepting and sorting donations, customer service, cashiering, merchandising, marketing, generating financial reports, general maintenance and training fellow co-workers.

“Individuals with disabilities earn real wages and therefore are enabled to more fully integrate in community life. It has truly been a pleasure to see the many positive effects these operations have had on all of the individuals and public involved.”



Staffed by 25 full- and part-time employees, the secondhand store is open 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. weekdays and noon to 5 p.m. Sundays.

On weekdays, the store’s busiest time is after 3 p.m.; on Sundays, customer traffic is heaviest in the afternoon.

The 9,450-square-foot store is divided into sections for clothing, household items, electronics, furniture and appliances.



Customers can pay by cash or credit.

Services include a thrift retail operation, a tax-deductible donation center, and large item and estate donation pickup services.

The store accepts furniture, clothing, accessories, shoes, large and small appliances, jewelry, art, sporting equipment, tools, linens and many other items.

“Donations of gently used items may be made directly to our two retail locations, or for large items and estates, we can often arrange a pickup,” Bourque said.

According to Leah Cooley, regional retail sales manager, only items in good repair are accepted and resold to the public.

“In general, items sold encompass the categories of clothing and shoes, linens, housewares and electrical, media, vintage and furniture,” she said.

“Prices are low, even compared to other thrift operations, so there is a very quick turnover of inventory.

“Quality clothing and furniture is to be had at a fraction of its original cost. A general rule of thumb for retail pricing is that an item in a resale store should sell for 15 to 25 percent of expected cost of (the) item new. Items that are vintage or new would not follow this guideline.”

Items in good repair are accepted and resold as is.

“Since we are unable to test all electrical and appliances, Tried & True has a three-day refund policy if these items are nonoperational,” Cooley said. “(The item) must be returned with an original receipt and original price tag on (the) item. All other sales are final, but we do have two dressing rooms to try on clothing to make sure you are happy with the product.”

Cooley estimated close to 60 percent of store’s sales is clothing, ranging from children’s clothing to designer labels.

One valuable lesson Cooley has learned since opening the store is when operating a nonprofit business, customers and donors want to know what the operation they are supporting is doing with the money it generates.

“We are proud of what we do and encourage people to ask us about our programs and services at

STEP,” Cooley said. “It is unlike anything in the community. With every dollar that is spent and every donation dropped off, people directly interact with the people their donations and purchases support.”

Cooley offers this advice to new business owners: “Let everyone know what you are doing. In the month prior to opening, every person that STEP staff came in contact with was told about the store.

“That includes the tech at the nail salon. She organized a clothing drive with a local high school National Honor Society (chapter). It also included the waiter at the restaurant down the street who began passing fliers to all his customers. People love the opportunity to support something they believe in — give them the chance to believe in your business.”