

Middle Township's St. Mary's thrift shop expands in size and service to those in need

By DEBRA RECH, For The Press | Posted: Thursday, March 11, 2010



Mustard Seed president Tim Nobel and thrift shop manager Stephanie Greco. The This and That Thrift shop, run by non-profit Mustard Seed organization through St. Mary's Episcopal Church in Stone Harbor, has expanded the shop and held a grand re-opening last week. Money raised by the shop goes toward creating affordable housing and to the needy in Cape May County. Wednesday Mar. 10, 2010. (Dale Gerhard /Press of Atlantic City).

MIDDLE TOWNSHIP - When members of St. Mary's Church saw a need for affordable housing in Cape May County, they decided to do something about it.

The Stone Harbor church opened St. Mary's This 'N' That Thrift Store in 2007 to raise money for their cause, selling mostly clothing.

Today, the store, now located in the Village Shoppes of Rio Grande, and its mission are larger than organizers ever envisioned.

"We are overwhelmed by the number of people who come in the doors each day," said Tim Noble, a resident of Stone Harbor and member of St. Mary's. "It has become not just a store but a meeting place and a place for companionship. We work with the Branches (located next door and run by St. Mary's and St. Barnabas by the Bay Church) and provide free soup and bread on Wednesday afternoons. We also donate money to other organizations in the county who work to help the needy."

Noble is president of Mustard Seed of Cape May County, an independent, faith-based nonprofit group formed in 2009 to help the needy. Volunteers from the organization help run St. Mary's thrift shop and Heavenly Scavengers, which helps find furniture for needy families in the county.

Mustard Seed is funded solely through the funds generated by the thrift store, which held a grand reopening last week after adding two rooms to its original three.

Mustard Seed recently presented a check for \$25,000 to Family Promise of Cape May County, which helps homeless families.

"That was part of a challenge gift," Noble said. "We challenged Family Promise to raise money and we would match it so they did. We also donated \$25,000 to the Coalition Against Rape and Abuse for their transitional housing project and money to Piloting American Dreams, a new organization which also works to find affordable housing in Cape May County. They recently bought a house with three apartments in it and we gave them \$25,000 as well."

The thrift store now has about 20 volunteers and four paid employees and has much more than clothing. Furniture and household goods are also sold in its five large rooms.

On the reopening day, a crowd was waiting outside the door. Josie Rich, a volunteer from Stone Harbor and member of St. Mary's Church, said it was just a typical day.

"We see so many people come here each day, we have many regulars," Rich said. "I've been here for two years and I am still surprised by the turnout we get. The donations of clothing are absolutely incredible. We get clothing from all over the county, even Philadelphia. We're always packed with customers."

Jane and Joe Paschal, of Avalon, are two of the regular shoppers. They were among the first in line for the reopening, and Joe headed straight for the men's pants section.

"We come here for the price, obviously," Joe Paschal said. "You can't beat it. And the people who work here are so friendly. You never know what you're going to find, but it's always a good deal. One man's trash is another's treasure."

Jane Paschal agreed.

"I love the way the clothes are presented, so professionally," she said. "We shop here not just for the price but for the people. We've made some good friends here as well."

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If you go

St. Mary's This 'N' That Thrift Store is open from 10 a.m. to

4 p.m. Mondays to Saturdays.

It is located at 1304 Route 47 South in the Village Shoppes of Rio Grande. For more information, call the store at 886-7272.