

More than one way to recycle: thrift shop offers bargains

By Aaron Kemnitz, Staff Reporter 12/06/2007

Walk into the thrift shop at St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Pleasant Valley, and the first thing that comes to **Ellen Kutner's** mind is recycling.

But, she doesn't see aluminum cans, cardboard boxes or plastic bottles. She sees the same thing found at most thrift shops: clothing, handbags and an assortment of other goods.

Nonetheless, the word, recycle, is first on her mind.

"This is the ultimate in recycling," she said, pointing at the rows of children's clothes and neatly-stacked columns of shoes.

Kutner, owner of Simply Organized, helped turn St. Paul's thrift shop into what it is today. A certified professional organizer, Kutner makes her living cleaning out messy closets and setting up efficient storage spaces.

When she walked into the shop about five years ago, she saw that it could use some help. Garbage bags full of clothing littered the floor and the walls were lined with only one row of hangers. The medicinal pink walls and equally unattractive flooring didn't add to the space, either.

After a lot of hard work, the shop is now sporting a whole new look due to a fresh paint job and a more efficient double-hung system for the clothing.

And the new look is paying off. Although only open on Wednesday and Saturday, along with a few special times during church events, the shop receives more than its fair share of bargain hunters.

"The place is just fabulous. This is easily the neatest thrift shop I've ever been in. It's bright, it's open and it's easy to find what you are looking for," said regular Fran Messina of Stanfordville. "The volunteers here are great, too."

While Kutner works behind the scenes - organizing displays and pricing items - she is one of those volunteers. Organizing may be her job, but St. Paul's was a project she happily did on her own time.

"It's just fun and it goes toward a good cause. Not only do people get great deals, but all proceeds go toward keeping the lights and the heat on at the church," she said.

Some of those "great deals" are almost hard to believe. One lucky shopper picked up an authentic Coach handbag for only a few dollars. Shoppers can also pick up holiday decorations, household items and even, occasionally, brand new games and toys.

Kutner pointed to a set of Bratz dolls and a game of Cranium as evidence of the amazing deals. Both items, still neatly wrapped, had been long forgotten and only recently dug out of closet during one of Kutner's organizing jobs. Now, they can go to a family for literally pennies on the dollar and help a few people in the process.

"We really like to think of this as outreach and a way of helping people who need it. It's very important to me to volunteer and give back to a place that important to me," said Kutner.

St. Paul's thrift shop is located at the corner of Traver Road and Route 44 in Pleasant Valley. Visit <http://www.simplyorg.com> for more information about Simply Organized.