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New stop for Florence thrifty to shop

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NORTHAMPTON - An estimated 300 people walked through the doors of the Annunciation Thrift Store in Florence Saturday - not bad for its first day in business. Many retailers would kill for foot traffic like that.

Located in the parish center basement of Our Lady of the Annunciation at 87 Beacon St., the shop sells donated clothing, household items, jewelry, children's books, videos and other items.

"A lot of odds and ends" is how Patricia Shaughnessy describes the merchandise at the shop, which held its grand opening Saturday.

Shaughnessy coordinated the project with fellow parishioner Barbara Kaczenski. She said the shop aims to provide an inexpensive way for people to buy clothing and household items, while also raising money for the Catholic parish's programs and services.

"It's really a fun and worthwhile endeavor for the community" said Shaughnessy, a 57-year-old Northampton native who has lived in Florence since 1976. "Everyone is looking at how their dollar is spent right now and I think we offer a reasonably priced selection."

In its opening day, she said the shop made around $300 in sales. With an all-volunteer, 12-person staff, all-donated merchandise and little overhead costs, most of the $300 is profit, Shaughnessy said.

Parish pastor John Gawienowski said he was thrilled with the shop's debut.

"We're in days of uncertainty here, and it's kind of tough to open something like this, but the grand opening went well," he said.

The idea for opening a thrift shop came to Shaughnessy last summer while visiting Cape Cod. Noticing how popular thrift shops were on the Cape, she thought, "Why couldn't we do that?"

When Shaughnessy proposed opening a shop at the church, Gawienowski said, "go for it."

By around November, Shaughnessy, parishioners, church maintenance workers and other local community members began to move the shop's supplies into what used to be the lunch room of Annunciation School, a Catholic elementary school, which closed over 30 years ago. Volunteers refurbished the space, set up a dressing room and collected items.

The shop has not calculated its start-up costs yet, said Shaughnessy, but it won't be high since the majority of labor and supplies were donated.

She said one of the biggest donations came from Marianne Dunn, the owner of Northampton Party World before her 24-year-old business closed in the fall of 2008, who donated the display cabinets from her former store.

The shop is also looking for a name, said Shaughnessy.

For now, the thrift shop is only open on Saturdays between 9 a.m. and 2 p.m., but Shaughnessy and Gawienowski hope to expand business hours eventually. The shop accepts donations Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the Annunciation parish center.

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