



Reading Eagle: Lauren A. Little | From left, OppShop manager Jennifer Soto and Opportunity House development Vice President Kate Alley, President Modesto Fiume, and director of the reuse/recycle program Jeff Kistler pose in their soon-to-open shop in Muhlenberg Township. They were loading in fixtures Wednesday. - See more at: <http://readingeagle.com/money/article/oppshop-community-reuserecycle-store-to-open#sthash.XK54dyG2.dpuf>

OppShop community reuse/recycle store to open

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By Courtney H. Diener-Stokes

Next month, Berks will see a high-end, reuse/recycle store open to benefit the community.

"We wanted a way to bring in extra funding for our programs, but that would also benefit the community," said Katherine Alley, vice president of development at Opportunity House.

Opportunity House is a multiservice organization in Reading benefiting children, families and adults who face obstacles to independent living.

Say hello to the OppShop.

Reuse and recycle

"Through the OppShop, we'll be able to employ people, some of whom are coming out of our program," Alley said. "We also will be able to reuse and recycle things that people have discarded and would have ended up in a landfill."

OppShop, to open July 23, will be located in the Penn Plaza Shopping Center in Muhlenberg Township. Alley said the Opportunity House organization plans to offer an alternative to some other thrift-shop experiences.

"We worked with the St. Vincent de Paul Society, and learned from them a way of making a retail experience as similar as if you were going into a nice store, rather than your typical retail thrift shop," Alley said.

The St. Vincent de Paul Society is a nonprofit human services organization in Lane County, Oregon that has 14 retail stores.

"They got a Robert Wood Johnson grant to teach other people how to open up their own high-end, reuse/recycle programs," Alley said.

Opportunity House will also be selling items through a few different avenues online.

"We have an eBay Inc. store, an Amazon.com store and www.half.com is where we sell the books," she said. "eBay is where we sell select items of interest, but we will also have items of value and interest sold at the retail location."

Under construction

OppShop's 12,000-square-foot retail space is under construction.

"We had to fully transform it," Alley said. They needed to "add an office for the eBay store and an ADA bathroom to make it handicap accessible, office space for the staff and a warehouse space to accept the items."

Alley said they want customers to feel as though treasures are waiting for them.

"The quality of merchandise is exciting and good, and even though it's not new, it's going to be high quality," she said. "You can find treasures in other people's discards."

OppShop will carry clothing for men, women and children, appliances, housewares, linens, sheets, blankets, sporting equipment and furniture.

Interesting things

"We are getting all kinds of interesting things," Alley said. "We had a beautiful mink coat donated, and we had a chess book written by Garry Kasparov that was signed by him."

Donations will come from various sources, including local businesses.

"We are currently partnering with Bills Khakis, who gives us their seconds, and we'll be looking for other retail partners," she said. "Primarily we are accepting donations from our donation bins around town and at the store location itself."

OppShop offers pickup services for the donation of large items.

"We just had someone donate an air hockey table," Alley said.

High-end approach

Their high-end approach to the retail experience isn't going to impact the price of items they sell.

"We are very competitively priced with other retail thrift shops in the area," she said. "The funds raised from the sale of these items will enable us to continue helping people in Berks County, to help our mission in the areas of homeless services, 24/7 day care, child advocacy programs for abused children and transitional housing."

Alley said loans from several sources helped to make it possible for Opportunity House to open their first store.

"Berks County Community Foundation and the Wyomissing Foundation and a loan from a group called Community First Fund," she said.

Alley, who said 12 employees will be operating the store, sees all of the hard work and planning that has gone into the upcoming launch of OppShop already paying off.

"Seeing people getting paid and excited to work a job regularly, seeing people take pride in their work and seeing the wonderful donations coming in" is great, she said. Rewarding to her and the organization: "Realizing how much this will benefit our program and clients, and to know we can continue to help people in Berks County," she said.

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