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Turning Others' Junk Into Treasure for Local Charities

By MELANIE GRAYCE WEST

What the residents of Westchester cast off from their homes, Pam Stone turns into a big donation for local charities.

Ms. Stone, 51 years old, opened a nonprofit thrift store, the Benefit Shop, a few months ago in a shopping center in Bedford Hills, N.Y. All total, she's been able to contribute about \$75,000 of sales proceeds to local organizations. Through an arrangement last year, most of the money she's raised from donated items has gone to the Northern Westchester Hospital. She says that now she also contributes to local children's organizations, health and pets causes.



PAM STONE

She started the nonprofit after a 20-year career on Wall Street. "I was done with Wall Street and I wanted to do something that would make me really happy," says Ms. Stone, who's always had an interest in and eye for antiques.

When she lived in New York, she enjoyed going to Housing Works, the popular charity thrift stores throughout the city, to look for interesting items. And in Bedford, where she lives with her family, she goes to estate sales for kicks.

It was at those estate sales that she inquired about what happened to the unsold leftovers—the perfectly good furniture and fun knickknacks. Most of it just went to the curb. That inspired her to get her family and friends involved, develop a business plan and open a shop.

"I thought there'd be benefits on so many levels because people who donate, like a Thanksgiving table, it would live on to make nice Thanksgiving memories for the next family it went to," she says. "This area, we're very fortunate, has really beautiful things, big homes and they are very generous. The donations have been incredible."

She uses a catchphrase, "I'm not kidding," when describing donations. Among them: an autographed photo of golfer Arnold Palmer, oil paintings, Limoges porcelain dishes, Baccarat crystal stemware, light fixtures, fur coats, a custom-made breakfront cabinet, brass platters and Southwestern pottery.

"We picked up a house where their entire sunroom was ode to July Fourth. I'm not kidding," she says. "So we had to designate an entire table to flags."

Her store is best described as layers of household and decorative items, stacked deep and high. In one section, she's clustered all the yellow decorative items. Everywhere, tables are set with china. Look up, and there are paintings to the ceiling. In a back room, chairs and sofas are stacked at least 15 feet high.

She pays movers to deliver items to the store. An army of volunteers, including her parents and local teenagers, help out but she's there seven days a week. "I'm not very good at sitting still. That is for sure," she says.

Write to Melanie Grayce West at melanie.west@wsj.com

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