

Business

Feathering your nest for a good cause

By EVE MARX

"Whoever said money can't buy happiness simply didn't know where to shop," the actress Bo Derek famously once said. Now spending money can buy more than personal happiness — it can actually go to help others. That's where The Benefit Shop comes in.

The Benefit Shop is the creation of Pamela Stone, a former Wall Streeter who has gone all out for charity. The Benefit Shop, located at 720 North Bedford Road, right next to Carvel and Sammy's Kosher, sells estate home furnishings (and estate clothes) for charity. The shop is staffed by volunteers, all the items for sale have been donated, and all proceeds will go to local worthy charities.

Ms. Stone worked as a salesperson on Wall Street for 20 years; she's married, she's lived in Bedford for 8 1/2 years, and has a child in the Bedford Central School District. She's also a lifelong, committed, inveterate tag sale and thrift shop shopper.

"I went to my first tag sale when I was 6," Ms. Stone said on the grand opening day of The Benefit Shop. "And I guess I never quit."

When she was downsized from her Wall Street job two years ago, Ms. Stone came up with a plan. Ready for a change, she decided to take her long-standing hobby of cruising estate sales and turn it into a profession. The first step was research and then to create a business plan.

A few months ago when Ms. Stone was ready to launch, the opportunity to have a dress rehearsal for her new business came up across the street. In a donated empty retail space in the ShopRite Shopping Center, Ms. Stone opened a practice run of The Benefit Shop, and within four weeks was able to raise \$45,000 for the Northern Westchester Hospital. "We sold 95 percent of the merchandise that we brought in," Ms. Stone said. That success spurred her to carry on in this new space across the street.

Her landlord offered her two months rent free (she will be paying rent in the near future) to get the business going, and the items for sale began pouring in. "We have something for every taste," Ms. Stone said.



Pam Stone settles in at The Benefit Shop. Below, shoppers at The Benefit Shop in Bedford Hills.

There is new merchandise every week and unique finds for every taste. The things for sale are collected treasures from estate sales from Park Avenue, New York City; Greenwich, Conn.; and Westchester. In the store expect to find service porcelain, signed etchings, oil paintings, mahogany dining chairs, dining tables, dressers, silverware, armoires, china, jewelry, lamps, clothes, books and much more.

"It's a fun shopping experience," Ms. Stone said. Indeed, at one o'clock in the afternoon on a frigid late January day, the store was pleasantly crowded with bargain hunters and casual browsers and lovers of bric-a-brac. The sunny main room is full but not crammed with home furnishings, everything very neat and tidy and

clean.

"There's an entire back room full of clothes, and right now it is full of Armani," Ms. Stone said.

Hmmmm. Wondering what to wear to your next black-tie event? Pay a visit here to hunt down your cloak and gown.

You can't talk about retail for charity without mentioning Oxfam, the international model that began in Britain. The first Oxfam charity shop was established in Oxford in December of 1947. Today Oxfam has more than 700 stores in the United Kingdom, used books being one of their largest assets. Oxfam is now the second largest retailer of secondhand books in Britain, with affiliates in the Netherlands, Germany, Ireland and Hong Kong. More locally, there are a small number

of charitable storefront businesses, notably Connie's Bakery and General Store in Mount Kisco, which benefits the Northern Westchester Hospital, as well as Twigs Thriftree in Mount Kisco, The Opportunity Shop in Chappaqua, the American Cancer Society Discovery Shop in Chappaqua, and Treasure Thrift Shop in Armonk. The Benefit Shop's grand opening on Jan. 27 marks it as the newest venture.

Ms. Stone has an MBA from the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania and she knew how to set up a 501(c)3 plan. "The money is to go to the hospital, the Boys & Girls Club, Neighbors Link," she said. "I'd like to give to as many charities as I am able."

Ms. Stone is actively looking for donations. "We want estates," she said. She has set up a page for The Benefit Shop on Facebook and is actively networking.

"Wall Street was enjoyable, but I love this," she said. "I love sales and I love the idea that I can work for charity. I love meeting the people and hearing their stories."

She mentioned a young couple who came into the shop who she helped to furnish their first home. "They bought things for their kitchen, they bought a hutch, some bookshelves, an entire master bedroom set." She said people like to buy because they know it's all going to a good cause. "It's a win-win situation," Ms. Stone said. "I want to open more of these shops."

So far everyone involved in getting the space open has volunteered their skills and time. "Everything has been donated, including our sign," Ms. Stone said. She's not at all unhappy to have traded her power suit for a pair of pink Uggs. "It's my hope to bring all my background and experience to this, and establish something permanent in the community. And I love how everyone has gotten involved. Look, that's my dad working the cash register."

The Benefit Shop is open seven days a week from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. It is located on Route 117, at 720 North Bedford Road, Bedford Hills.

