NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://ncronline.org)

Thrift stores in rural towns help needy, answer call to stewardship

Joe Ruff Catholic News Service | Oct. 12, 2013
Verdigre, Neb.

Shirts run $2 to $4, jeans $4.

Looking for furniture? A kitchen table and four chairs cost about $30, a love seat $25, an upholstered arm chair and lamp are both $10.

It's the Verdigre Carousel Thrift Shop, founded on Main Street in a town -- Verdigre -- that before July didn't have a clothing store or a furniture store.

Inspired by a priest of the Omaha archdiocese -- Fr. James Kramper -- the store is run by volunteers fueled by faith and a desire to help people in need while inviting people in the community of 570 to share gently used goods with one another.

And all of the proceeds are funneled back into ministries and projects in the community.

One recent customer stepped past the carousel horse that sits outside the store, entered and came out moments later with two pairs of shoes and a coat for chilly fall weather -- all for $12.

"He was so pleased," said Connie Gompert, one of three founders of the store and owner of the building that houses all of the clothes, blankets, books, pictures, toys, appliances and stuffed animals.

It's not the only nondenominational secondhand store with a charitable focus inspired by Kramper. There is the Sunset Store that opened five years ago in an old lumber yard on the west side of Ewing, and its satellite Santa Shop on Main Street in the town where Kramper is pastor of St. Peter de Alcantara Parish, and the New to You shop in Emerson, where he was pastor of Sacred Heart Parish from 1996 to 2002.

Since its founding 14 years ago, the store in Emerson has given away more than $100,000 to various causes, Kramper said.

"He doesn't push it, but he does these things and you see how it helps the community," said Deacon Keith Pavlik, a member of St. Wenceslaus Parish in Verdigre whose wife, Theresa, helped found and now volunteers at the Verdigre store.

Kramper, also pastor of two other parishes, has encouraged volunteers to build miniature golf courses as parish projects in Lindsay and Decatur and held other creative fundraisers, raising more than $5,000 in the process.

"I give God credit for planting the idea," Kramper told the *Catholic Voice*, Omaha's archdiocesan newspaper. "And then I dream. And then I have to find people who can carry it out."

Theresa Pavlik said she met Kramper several years ago, and he mentioned the importance of secondhand stores to small towns.

A flier made by Kramper spells out some of the benefits: Thrift stores can bring new life to empty buildings, help people recycle goods they no longer use, provide shoppers with inexpensive clothing and other items, and with volunteer labor can help raise money for community projects.

The idea was planted, and it bore fruit in October, when Pavlik's mention of it in passing intrigued Cheryl Vesely of Verdigre, the third founder of the enterprise, who began to look for the right building. Then Gompert moved to town in December, learned about the project, found an empty building for sale -- a long-closed department store -- and bought it.

After some renovations, the store opened in July, and it has been a hit ever since, Pavlik said.

A committee of six Verdigre residents, including members of the Methodist, Lutheran and Catholic faiths, will meet every three months to decide where to funnel the proceeds. Schools, 4-H clubs, street improvements, the local swimming pool all are possible beneficiaries, Pavlik said.

Similar groups benefit from the Sunset Store and the Santa Shop in Ewing, which last year gave away a total of $13,373 in profits to a community garden, senior center, police and fire departments, shelter for pregnant women and other organizations and causes in Ewing, surrounding communities and across the archdiocese, Kramper said.

"We generate $1,000 or more every month," Kramper said. "It comes in, goes out and does a lot of good."

Several families in the area around Ewing who have lost their homes and possessions to fire or flood have been invited into the store over the years and allowed to take whatever they need.

Kramper also finds places for items that don't leave the store shelves, such as clothes sent to the Orphan Grain Train in Norfolk for the needy in the United States and around the world, and stuffed animals to O'Neill, where they are sent as part of packages to troops stationed overseas so they can share them with children in the areas they serve.

"We're kind of an important link in the recycling chain," Kramper said.

And the impetus is the Christian call to stewardship, he said.

"There are so many gifts in the community we are calling forth," he said. "Not only in sharing goods but some volunteers are good with the public, some are good at putting items out on the store shelves, others are good at bringing items into the store.

"For many of these items, it's a chance to have another round, rather than being thrown out or put away in the attic. And the money goes to whatever needs there are."

[Joe Ruff is news editor of the *Catholic Voice*, newspaper of the archdiocese of Omaha, Neb.]

Source URL (retrieved on *12/01/2015 - 06:15*): http://ncronline.org/news/peace-justice/thrift-stores-rural-towns-help-needy-answer-call-stewardship