

New Carrboro PTA Thrift Shop to open by August

By Dorothy Irwin

PTA Thrift Shop isn't just a thrift store, and it's about more than just school PTAs.

Often a favorite source of second-hand treasures, PTA Thrift Shop has also been a staple of the Chapel Hill-Carrboro community since it opened in 1952.

"They're just really supportive and involved in the community, and really reliable," said Jamie Rohe, homeless programs coordinator for the Orange County Partnership to End Homelessness.

A groundbreaking ceremony was held on Jan. 24 for the PTA Thrift Shop's new building project at its Carrboro location on Jones Ferry Road. The first phase of the building project will consist of 22,000 square feet, of which 14,000 square feet will be designated to PTA Thrift Shop operations, including retail space, offices and donation areas, according to Barbara Jessie-Black, PTA Thrift Shop executive director.

The remaining 8,000 square feet will be leased to Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools (CHCCS) Pre-K and Head Start administrative offices. This first phase of the project, which is in progress now, is scheduled to be completed by the end of August 2013, she said. Phase two of the building, which does not yet have a timeline, will consist of more lease space for restaurants, retail and office space.

PTA Thrift Shop's primary recipients are PTAs in the local school system, amounting to over \$200,000 in donations annually. The individual PTAs are then responsible for determining which programs within their schools to fund with the contributions, Jessie-Black said.

According to Debra Scott, principal at McDougle Middle School, the funds have been used in the past to add technology and fund cultural arts programs for each grade level. Last year PTA Thrift Shop helped fund a program that brought Holocaust survivors to the school to talk with eighth-grade students, she said.

McDougle has parents organize for



Staff Photo by Dorothy Irwin

The PTA Bikepath sign stands by the construction site for the new PTA Thrift Shop, which is located on Jones Ferry Road, where the previous store stood. This phase of the building project is scheduled to be finished by August 2013.

students to work at PTA Thrift Shop as a fundraiser, and the PTA pushes the involvement every year because it is such a great program, Scott said.

"We have really been able to see a difference this year without their support," Scott added. "Our funds are down and we have had to cut back across the budget for programs at McDougle."

Local PTAs, however, are only a portion of the beneficiaries of PTA Thrift Shop. The store also contributes to the Inter-Faith Council for Social Service (IFC), the Orange County Department of Social Services, TABLE and Project Connect, among other nonprofit organizations.

The IFC receives clothing vouchers from PTA Thrift Shop that clients can use to pick out what they need from the store. Each household in the IFC's Chapel Hill/Carrboro service area can get one voucher every six months; these vouchers are free for IFC clients.

"It's really helpful to us because our

clients are in need of clothing, but they don't have the resources to buy things they need themselves," said Kristin Lavergne, community services director for the IFC for Social Service.

These vouchers are the IFC's main resource for helping people get the clothing they need. The IFC has tried to host its own clothing closets in the past, Lavergne said, but those are a lot to manage. They found out from experience that it is beyond what the IFC can handle. With the PTA Thrift Shop vouchers available, it's more efficient for everyone to have it set up this way, she said.

The IFC gave out 1,287 PTA Thrift Shop vouchers in the last fiscal year (July 2011-June 2012) from its Carrboro office alone. The Carrboro location primarily serves people who have a place to live but just need some additional help, Lavergne said. Vouchers are also given out at HomeStart and Community House in addition to those

given out from the Carrboro branch.

PTA Thrift Shop starts collecting coats in the spring for Project Connect's annual event according to Rohe, who is the project's lead coordinator. Though over the years the store has donated different items such as tote bags, PTA Thrift Shop's main contribution to the annual day of service is coats. They donate several hundred coats each year, and people have come to expect it, Rohe said. According to Jessie-Black, they donated 230 coats in 2012. People can look through the coats and pick one out, and there is always a large variety, Rohe said. The majority of the event's coats come from PTA Thrift Shop. Volunteers are also provided from PTA Thrift Shop's executive team for Project Connect's big event each year, Jessie-Black said.

The relationship with TABLE is more recent and consists of an annual in-store food drive benefiting TABLE. Jessie-Black said the store also partners with other local nonprofits on a more limited basis depending on the need.

The PTA Thrift Shop periodically has events during which they market to their customers the opportunity to purchase gift cards to be distributed to families in need in the CHCCS district, Jessie-Black said. Once collected, the gift cards are passed on to the school district for distribution to families based on need.

In addition to helping local schools and nonprofit organizations directly, PTA Thrift Shop has received national recognition and awards for its environmentally friendly and sustainable practices. It received the 2010 Progress Energy Sustainable Business of the Year Award and has received "Green Plus Certification" through the Institute for Sustainable Development.

"Our core values include support-

PTA Thrift Locations

Former location/build site: 103 Jones Ferry Rd., Carrboro, NC 27510

Temporary Carrboro location: 201 W. Weaver St., Carrboro, NC 27510
Hours: Mon.-Sat. 8:30-6pm, closed Sun.
Phone: (919) 942-6565

Chapel Hill Location: 103 S. Elliott Rd. (next to Whole Foods in the Village Plaza), Chapel Hill, NC 27514
Hours: Mon.-Sat. 8:30-7pm, Sun. 12pm-7pm
Donations: Wed.-Sat. 8:30am-6pm.
Phone: (919) 942-6101

Executive office: 115 W. Main St., Carrboro, NC 27510
Phone: (919) 942-6565

ing the tenets of the triple bottom line of sustainability," Jessie-Black said, "which includes people, planet and performance and how those three components, when equally concentrated on, contribute not only to the organization's sustainability and success, but also to the community's."

Throughout the construction, PTA Thrift Shop's Chapel Hill store on South Elliot Road is remaining open, and a temporary Carrboro location is open at 201 W. Weaver St. during the new building construction.

Lavergne has not heard many complaints from IFC clients about the main Carrboro store being temporarily closed. Normally if people are unable to find what they need at one location, they can check the other, but that option is not available during the construction. While limited transportation can also be an issue, ongoing communication has made this transition better, Lavergne said.

According to Rohe, another interest-

ing dimension to the thrift shop as an organization is Jessie-Black's dedication to making the community a better place.

"She's a very bright woman – very effective – has really good connections and relationships and is very involved as a community member," Rohe said.

Jessie-Black serves on the leadership team of the Orange County Partnership to End Homelessness. She serves on the Job Partners Committee, which focuses on helping people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless become job-ready and find jobs, as well as finding employers who are willing to hire at-risk employees. Jessie-Black has also employed people at the PTA Thrift Shop who were previously homeless, Rohe said.

"Every organization is a strong reflection of its leadership," Rohe said, "and Barbara as a community member and a community leader cares deeply about community justice and the well-being of this community."

