



Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel

Co-manager Carolyn Cunningham makes sure everything is displayed 'just so' at The Daisy.

'Daisies' worth a million dollars to area's poor

By NICOLE STRICKER

SENTINEL CORRESPONDENT

CAPITOLA — A spunky group of women has made a million-dollar difference for the area's poor.

For more than 30 years, the group — a local auxiliary for the Family Service Agency of the Central Coast — has operated The Daisy, a second-hand clothing shop, and funneled all proceeds to the agency.

Over the years, sales at the shop and at its annual Holiday arts and crafts fair have added up. Proceeds are expected to top \$1 million by the end of this year, said David Bianchi, agency director.

"We've been the sole beneficiary for this organization," Bianchi said. "After the United Way and the county, they're probably our third-largest source of funding."

A group of prominent local women thought up the auxiliary and the shop in 1968.

"Someone had the idea that we should help Family Services, which was then new in the community," said Millie FitzGerald, a Daisy since 1976. "At that time I think (the agency was) basically counseling people who could not

The Daisy

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afford to go to a private counselor or therapist."

Daisy members, who call themselves "Daisies," decided on a "nearly new" clothing store, also called The Daisy, as their funding tool.

Annual profits have hit about \$50,000 in recent years.

The shop accepts clothing donations from the public and the Daisies themselves. But the women are choosy about what makes it to the racks.

"We try to keep our clothing upscale and up to date," FitzGerald said, adding that clothing that doesn't make the cut is donated to Goodwill or the homeless.

The shop is not a run-of-the-mill thrift store. It offers fashionable clothes, hand-knit sweaters, and shoes so new the soles are unscuffed. There are also fur coats and evening gowns.

The shop lacks the musty smell of other used-clothing stores, and it is immaculate. The women clean it themselves.

The group's devotion to Family Services fuels this dedication. Members are eager to discuss the agency, producing its pamphlet and newsletter from under the counter.

"In the last 10 years, they have expanded into a number of wonderful programs" FitzGerald said.

The agency began in 1958 as a counseling program because of a need in the community for low-cost counseling services, Bianchi said. Staffers have added programs over the years, including senior outreach, believed to be the first senior peer-counseling program in California.

The agency also maintains a multi-lingual, toll-free suicide-prevention hot line as well as grief support for the friends and families of suicide victims.

The Daisy

WHAT: A second-hand clothing store. All profits go to the Family Service Agency of the Central Coast.

ESTABLISHED: 1968 by prominent women of the community.

WHERE: 1550 41st Ave., Capitola.

HOURS: 1-4 p.m. Monday; 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Tuesday through Friday; noon to 4 p.m. Saturday.

PHONE: 462-3686.

It also provides outreach to high-risk teens and seniors.

The agency's newest program, Families in Transition, provides low-interest loans to parents who are either employed or in school. An estimated 15,000 people a year use the agency's services, most of which are free or discounted.

Bianchi is a Daisy board member — the only man in the bunch — and serves as the auxiliary's sole tie to the agency. He marvels at the group's dedication to an agency with which it has so little contact.

"To have nurtured this organization for almost 35 years is kind of amazing to me," he said. "Their only links are what I tell them and what they see in the news."

The group itself has grown along with the store profits. There are now about 70 actively participating Daisies, and another 70 who still pay dues.

In addition to proceeds from the shop, the group raises money with an annual arts and crafts fair. Holiday offers crafts, dolls, clothes and jewelry, much of it handmade by the Daisies themselves. This year's festival is Dec. 6-7 at the Fairgrounds in Watsonville.

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