

YWCA Thrift Store to close after 54 years

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OF THE REGISTER-PAJARONIAN

✓ WATSONVILLE — The economic recession has claimed another victim as the YWCA Thrift Store at 30-B E. Fifth St. is closing its doors after serving the Watsonville community for more than 50 years.

Proceeds from the store, which operates as a nonprofit, went to support YWCA programs including YW-Teens and the preschool program.

The thrift store's final day of operations will be on June 30.

A much-touted move to its E. Fifth Street location in July 2011 was not enough to save the shop, despite having increased parking and foot traffic.

After two years, the YWCA Board of Directors decided to close the store in light of many factors, in particular the slow recovery of the economy as well as increased competition from other bargain stores

and difficulties in recruiting volunteers, according to Berta Rodriguez, president of YWCA of Watsonville.

Shop co-manager Marion Madrid said she was "heartbroken" over the news. Madrid put in 20 hours a week at the store and said she will remember fondly the many occasions when parents would visit the shop in search of Halloween costumes or when during Easter children would stop to admire the holiday decorations.

"It's very sad," said Beverly Young, former shop manager and volunteer. "It's been here for so long, it's a shame."

A resident of Watsonville for the last 65 years, Lydia Lerma is a longtime volunteer, having worked at the thrift store back when it was at its old East Lake location.

Lerma said she would miss the customers and all the opportunities it afforded her to meet



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Joe Martinez (left) browses the thrift store's selection while Albert Fernandez sorts through items Friday in Watsonville.

up with old friends — people with whom she used to work alongside at the canneries or at the Watsonville Community Hospital where she worked for 12 years in a gift shop.

"It is so sad, I am going to miss all our customers," said Lerma.

The shop also allowed high school students to volunteer for

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their community service hours and provided employment training to clients from Community Life Services, a nonprofit that helps people with disabilities learn how to live independently.

Employment & Independent Living Specialist Jennifer Chavez said her clients felt comfortable volunteering at the thrift store, where staff and other volunteers took the time to help them as they gained experience working in a retail environment.

Chavez placed about 10 clients at the shop, where they

learned customer service skills, how to stock and sort, pricing and overall upkeep.

Client Albert Fernandez has been volunteering at the thrift shop for two years and said working there has showed him how to "respect other people."

"There are nice people to talk to," said Fernandez.

"It's going to be sad not to have the placement here for them to build their skills," said Chavez.

"A lot of other places are not willing to give them that opportunity — it's been a good partnership."

The Santa Cruz County Court Referral program and the Volunteer Center also referred some of their clients to complete their

community service hours at the shop.

Leticia Mendoza, Executive Director of the YWCA stated in a press release that she is immensely grateful to the volunteers who have given of their time and talent to the store for so many years and wanted to acknowledge the commitment by the current Board of Directors and all former Board members who have kept the store open since 1959.

"I've met some wonderful people and made lasting friendships," said Young as she gathers with her fellow volunteers at the shop for one last photo.