

Corner Shop turns 50

Best-kept secret is making itself known

By Sandy Meindersma CORRESPONDENT



HOLDEN — After 50 years in business, the Corner Shop doesn't want to be the town's best-kept secret anymore.

So, to celebrate the shop's 50th anniversary this month, as well as to help publicize the mission of the used clothing and household goods store, which is located in the basement of the First Congregational Church, manager Susan Ross is undertaking a bit of a publicity campaign.

"Every single day somebody walks in and says, 'I never knew you were here,'" Mrs. Ross said. "We used to use 'the best kept secret in town' as our tag line, but we're really trying hard to get word out that we're here."

As part of that publicity campaign, First Congregational recognized the shop's volunteers and customers during the April 11 worship service. Mrs. Ross was also interviewed for Holden's cable television show "Faces and Places."

But for Mrs. Ross, the shop is more about its mission than it is about the sales.

"We have over 75 volunteers, about half of whom are members of the church, and half are not," she said. "Many are elderly, and there's a great camaraderie here. I have two 95-year-old ladies who come in every Monday for three hours to sort clothes."

Mrs. Ross said that 25 percent of the shop's revenue is returned to the church to cover overhead expenses, and that the store offers two \$1,000 scholarships to area high school seniors.

"All of our profits are used to benefit the community. We support the Wachusett Food Pantry, the Welcome Aldrich Fund, Abby's House and the Interfaith Hospitality Network.

"And we always respond to people in emergency situations. Last year there was a fire on Pleasant Street in Worcester, and a family of four had a connection to Holden through a grandfather. They were able to come in, and we were able to give them all of their emergency clothing."

Mrs. Ross says she sees God's hand in The Corner Shop's work every day.

"There are all kinds of small miracles that happen here," she said. "One woman really wanted this ivory wool coat, but didn't have the money. Another customer bought it for her and told her to buy herself a cup of coffee with the change."

The Corner Shop is open from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Tuesdays and Thursdays, and from 7 to 9 p.m. Thursdays.

Applications for the shop's scholarships are currently being accepted. Students who have

successfully completed one semester of study beyond high school at an accredited school or institution may apply. Application forms may be obtained from the Corner Shop during shop hours or from the church office. The deadline for applications is April 30, with awards to be made in June. For more information, call (508) 829-9270 or e-mail cornershop@fcholden.org.

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