



Attic Angel **BUILDS** Sense of Community through Second Chance Shop

BY KELLY CHERAMY

It's 8:45 a.m. on the lower level of Attic Angel Community, and the line of residents and staff is starting to form. The countdown is on for the opening of the thrice-yearly Second Chance Shop. Sweet anticipation has everyone feeling like a game-show winner, all just waiting to see what they've won. That's because the items they will get to choose from bear no price tag—everything is free.

When the doors swing open, each visitor methodically receives a shopper ID number and the following instructions: each person may select up to six items on this first day of the shop's run, and no money is necessary at checkout. The shopper's item

count is recorded, the goods are bagged, and the residents and staff shoppers leave very happy indeed.

"The looks of delight with their newfound treasures are priceless," says Attic Angel Community President Mary Ann Drescher. "For more than 20 years, our residents and staff have enjoyed the shop's generous spirit of giving, the fun of shopping with friends, and discovery of old-things-made-new."

Self-Fueled Engine

So how can a store possibly sell all of its merchandise for free? The secret is an age-old recipe for success that has defined Attic Angel Community since its founding more than

a century ago. It's called thrift, repurposing, recycling. Any way you dice it, it's a wise use of resources with plenty of goodwill to boot.

For background, Attic Angel Association was founded in 1889 by two sisters who descended from the third floor of their Victorian-era home bearing armloads of goods to share with families in need. When their father dubbed them his "attic angels," history was born.

Today's volunteer organization, numbering more than 500 women, continues the tradition of turning secondhand treasures into first-rate experiences through three signature sales: the community-wide At-

tic Sale, Classic Clothing Sale, and Holidays Galore & More Sale. The money made from these high-end thrift sales goes into community grants that support children and seniors around Dane County. In fact, a history of fundraising helped the association start a special brand of senior care that is now represented by Attic Angel Community on Old Sauk Road.

The Second Chance Shop is yet another facet of Attic Angel's efficiencies and shrewdness when it comes to secondhand thrift. Specifically donated for the residents and staff of Attic Angel Community, the items in the shop come from three sources: Attic Angel residents, staff members, and leftovers from the fundraising signature sales.

"Many residents donate things as they downsize with a new move," says Sandy Spengler, an Attic Angel resident who marks her 15th year running the sale. Other residents' changing lifestyles and physical abilities also translate to donations. Sometimes families want the items of loved ones to support the Attic Angel family.

"Nothing's wasted and everything goes to people in need," explains Sandy. "And it's really, really important from an ecological standpoint not to be sending it to the landfills."

Community Builder

Residents and staff alike love the treasure hunt and appreciate this perk of life at Attic Angel. It makes them feel like they're getting something no one else is getting. "And to our knowledge, that's true," Sandy says. "I don't know of any place else doing this, but they should."

Items in the Second Chance Shop are a true grab bag. They run the gamut from unopened packages of

shoestrings and greeting cards to used clothing and jewelry to housewares and DVDs to luggage and televisions. Some of the more coveted or valuable items are awarded by way of a drawing on the last day.

Though recycling is the event's main purpose, residents and employees also experience a lift in satisfaction with their life at Attic Angel. Three times a year (not counting the additional frequent drawings for large items that can't be stored), they look forward to rewarding themselves or finding items to pass along to loved ones. For staff members, their beneficiaries include adult children moving out on their own or, in some cases, relatives in much poorer countries.

"The Second Chance Shop helps so many people," Sandy explains. "It extends the power of recycling and strengthens the bond of the Attic Angel family far beyond our own walls."

For residents, the shop provides a safe and convenient on-site shopping experience without the worries of transportation and additional cost. For some, it's the only way they can safely venture beyond their living quarters, and they greatly enjoy the social outing. Though many residents claim no need for anything, they often find unique or useful treasures for themselves and gather white elephant gifts for their family holiday celebrations.

Value Beyond "Things"

As the shop tries to keep landfills empty, it has the opposite effect on spirits. Volunteers who run the shop, including some residents, enjoy making friends or even small talk with the people who donate and shop.

"I know practically everybody in the building," Sandy says of the 300 residents, 300 staff members, as well as



volunteer Angels who help with the shop.

For residents, two things stand above all else: the bona fide treasure hunt and the chance to contribute their own time and treasures to make the sale a success.

"The shop provides a fun opportunity and the ability to be a giver instead of just a receiver," says Judy Von Bergen, whose husband, Mick, is perhaps the shop's most enthusiastic customer. "I think helping the residents be givers is huge to their well-being."

Photographs provided by Attic Angel Community.

Kelly Cheramly is the outreach coordinator for Attic Angel Community.

