



Appleton  
Fox Cities  
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## Echoes store valuable to community

Looking to dress well, get needed household items, save money and help others? You can do all of these things at Echoes Gift & Thrift shop in Appleton.

Located on the corner of Mason Street and Wisconsin Avenue, Echoes is not only an excellent source for household goods and designer and name-brand clothing for men, women and children, it's also an excellent way to help others.

Every time you donate to or shop at Echoes, you help local people in need. Echoes donates its proceeds to local groups such as Leaven, Harbor House and Habitat for Humanity. It also donates clothing to the Emergency Shelter and Community Clothes Closet.

Based on an idea by Pastor Chris Quello of the First English Lutheran Church, Echoes was started in 2004 as a way to raise funds for a college internship program that provided music lessons, day camps and field trips for local children for free or nominal cost.

"We began with one intern, and through time, we were funding 20-28 interns," he said. "It was a great success. Not only did we expand the internship program, we also expanded our service to the community."

The Echoes operation is fiscally lean. It has only one paid full-time employee, store manager Kathy Hoffman; a paid part-time worker who works eight hours a week; and another who cleans the store. The remaining 20 or so workers are volunteers.

"There is so much need in our area, and we want to help as many people as possible," Hoffman said. "I'm frugal by nature, so I'm very careful with our expenses."

Serving as store manager has been rewarding and challenging for Hoffman, who wouldn't trade her work for "anything in the world." And at first glance, it couldn't be farther from her original profession.

"I was an oncology nurse," she said. "I worked at St. Elizabeth's oncology department until after my second child was born. Then I started volunteering at Echoes. I then became a part-time manager, but the demands were so great that it was clear they needed a full time person."

According to Amy Henderson, a volunteer and regular customer, Echoes provides a way for individuals and corporations to give back to the community.

"Volunteers benefit because we form good friendships," she said. "Our customers benefit because they can buy the things they need at a great price, and the proceeds from the sales benefit local people who need help."

That sentiment is echoed by Suzanne Swanson, who volunteers with her husband, Dr. Jack Swanson.

"Echoes is just a great place," she said. "Not long ago, a family lost their home and their belongings in a fire. We scoured our store for clothes for the entire family."

Others who have been helped by Echoes are teachers in search of classroom supplies and materials, and a pediatric hospice program in Milwaukee in search of books for their volunteers to read to their young patients.

The Swansons are also regular customers.

"I'm always amazed at the high quality of items in our store," she said.

I can vouch for that statement. On the day I was at the store, I spotted the following clothing brands: Tommy Hilfiger, Banana Republic, Talbots, Columbia and Aeropostale. I was thrilled to purchase a Ralph Lauren sweater for a few dollars.

"The neat thing about Echoes is that it provides a chance for everyone to help the community," Hoffman said. "People who feel they can't afford to contribute money are able to help by volunteering their time or donating items they no longer need. By cleaning out your house, you can help someone in need of a little help."

Echoes also provides excellent opportunities for young people.

"Young people can gain valuable experience in customer service, working with the public and merchandising," Hoffman said. "This gives them an advantage when they start applying for jobs."

Echoes is always in need of volunteers to help with the operations of the store, ranging from sorting merchandise to picking up donations from donors.

"We welcome help of any kind, big or small," Hoffman said. "People who can commit to coming in weekly, or those who are only able to help us out one time."

Here is a simple and easy way for you to give back to your community, even if you don't have money to donate or a lot of extra time. You can volunteer, even if it's just once, or donate things you no longer need. Contact the good people at Echoes at 920-882-8172, or e-mail at [echoes@felc.com](mailto:echoes@felc.com).

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