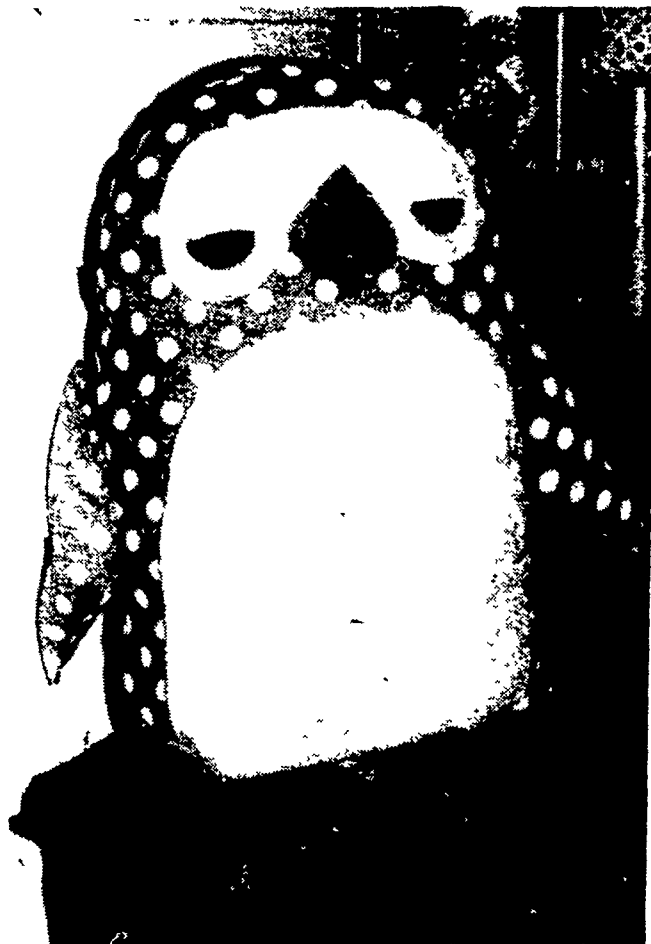


Recycling is their business



A stuffed owl is just one charming example of the stuffed dolls and animals which come to the Mennonite Central Committee for sale from the craftsmen of eastern Kentucky.

By SALLY BAIR
Feature Writer

Recycling is a popular word these days, but hardly an unfamiliar concept among the Pennsylvania Dutch folk in this area. There isn't a family around that hasn't recycled clothing regularly, passing items from one child to the next in the family or among close friends.

The Re-Uzit Shop at 50 E. Main Street in Mount Joy has made a business of recycling, and the community is the beneficiary. The Shop, sponsored by the Mennonite Central Committee, specializes in used clothing and household items, and for a small sum you can find almost anything you need, from anklets to zebras.

Verna Brandt, manager of the Re-Uzit Shop, explains the store this way, "It gives people an opportunity to unload things they don't want and allows them to buy things at a lower cost." Proceeds are donated to the MCC which uses the money for overseas work and relief work in this country.

After a July opening, "We have been swamped with donations - people have donated anything and everything. We do have to turn down furniture, because we have no place to store it.

"We look at it as a community service - and it is not just for lower income people," Verna said. "You can buy good things at very reasonable prices."

The most important aspect of the store is its good used clothing. "We do ask for it to be cleaned before it is donated, but occasionally some of us do wash items. We get a lot of nice clothes. We sort everything given to us and we keep those items which we feel will be of use to somebody. A few things which are not usable, we discard," Verna said.

The group also regularly donates to the Salvation Army, the American Mission

to Greece, and the Bowery Mission in New York City. Verna explained that they try to send usable items along with some less desirable ones so that the agencies will be willing to collect.

One large part of the store's inventory consists of self-help items purchased from the Mennonite Central Committee. Verna explained, "These are purchased from many countries with the MCC paying the craftsmen a living wage in that country." This form of help is particularly useful and better than just sending clothing, Verna explained, because clothing styles and needs are different. "The craftsmen receive a small wage, so we don't need to charge a lot for the items."

Indeed most of the gifts featured in the store are very reasonably priced, and the variety is as great as any conventional gift shop. There is exquisitely carved jewelry, carved wooden animals and puzzles, baskets and woven items, hanging plant holders and the largest array of really unusual stuffed dolls and animals imaginable.

Verna said, "We select things from MCC's stock, and try to get items which will move. It was difficult at first, but now we have some idea of what will sell."

The store is completely staffed by volunteers, with 85 to 90 on the roster to help regularly. Verna explained that there is a minimum of two on duty at any one time, and usually three or four are at work. "Several will be sorting and pricing and hanging items up, and one must be at the cash register."

Verna is very proud of her volunteers, and said, "Some work a few hours, some work one day a month and some work one day a week." Volunteers are welcome on whatever schedule is convenient to them. A volunteer coordinator does the

scheduling to ensure that someone is on duty to keep the store open during its regular business hours of 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily. Fridays it is open from 9 a.m. - 9 p.m. p.m.

Verna sees the Re-Uzit shop as a service for the volunteers. "They can work when they want to and how much they want to. It gives them an outlet they wouldn't otherwise have. They meet other people, and it gets them out of the house. It is good for them to have a break from routine, and be doing something worthwhile too."

She said conversation in the sorting room ranges from canning and freezing to other lively topics, with many women being from the farming community. While women sort the donations, they also have a sewing machine on hand for minor repairs and an ironing board to spruce up some things.

When a volunteer reports for the first time, Verna said, "I put her under someone's wing for the day. This has worked out pretty well. The first thing they are asked to do is just look around the store and get an idea of the items and their prices." She explained that as volunteers get familiar with the operation, they are given more responsibility. Volunteers, for instance, do all the pricing of the items, following a printed sheet of suggested guidelines. A pricing committee oversees the setting of prices, but Verna said there is often a wide variety of ideas on what an item should cost.

Verna herself is an unpaid volunteer which she explains by saying, "I'm not interested in being a paid manager." She retired two years ago as a nurse and in her "retirement" she doesn't want to feel completely tied down. She said, "In the first few months I spent a lot of time over at the store. Now I'm in a few hours in the morning." Her job is mostly coordinating, and she feels she has very qualified volunteers to keep things going smoothly.

"I enjoy the work - but you have to know your limits. Working with the volunteers is an education in interpersonal relationships," she says with a laugh.

She claims to have no background which would qualify her for the job. "They drafted me and talked me into it." As she reflects, she acknowledges, "I had a business course one time and I worked for an optometrist for a few years and did some office work. As a nurse, you need to learn to organize pretty well. If you don't keep order, you're sunk."

Verna retired from the Elizabethtown Children's Hospital after 27 years as a nurse. Part of her working career was spent at the Children's Rehabilitation Institute in Maryland, a school for children afflicted with Cerebral Palsy which is now part of the John F. Kennedy Institute at John Hopkins.

"I enjoyed working with children. They are much easier to care for than

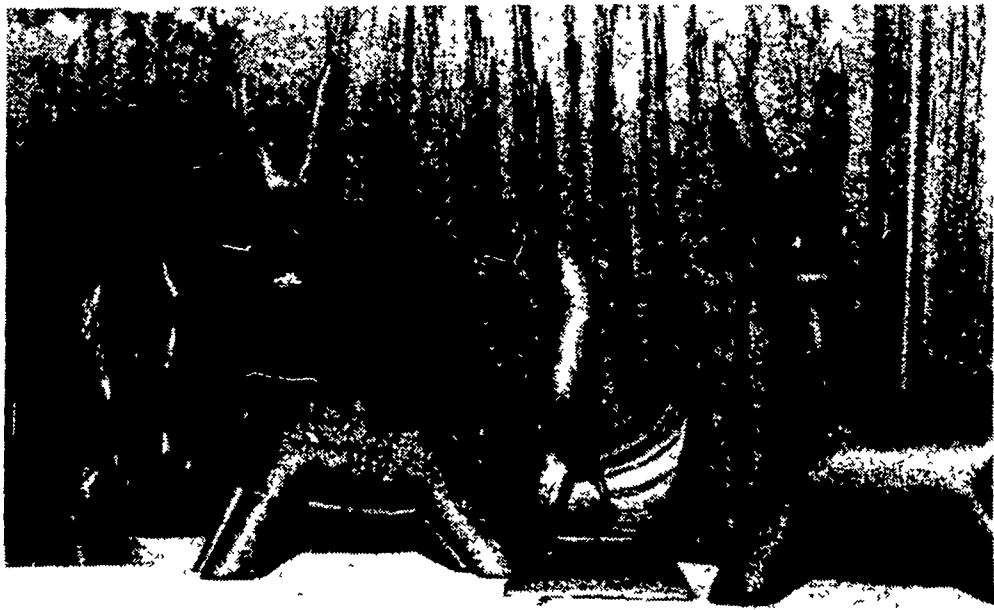
(Continued on Page 45)



Carved animals make up a large portion of the self-help items in the Re-Uzit Shop in Mount Joy. Verna Brandt points out some of the animals from the Philippines and from Israel.



Volunteer Anna Mary Newcomer, Mount Joy R3, is hard at work sorting men's trousers by waist measurement. Anna Mary spends one day a week in the shop.



These intricately carved animals were created by craftsmen in the Philippines.

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