

SKILLS & training

Goodwill opens Career Center in North Adams

Provides dedicated space for employment programs

BY BRAD JOHNSON

The recent reallocation of some space within the North Adams retail store operated by Goodwill Industries of the Berkshires and Southern Vermont Inc. has created a dedicated space for employment-related programs and services offered by the nonprofit organization.

This comes at a time when Goodwill has been expanding and reorganizing these programs to make them both more effective and more user-friendly in terms of access and scheduling.

"We keep looking at our programs as we go along," said Kathy Anker, director of mission services at Goodwill. "Everything evolves."

"A big part of what Kathy and others are doing involves putting together programs that address barriers to employment and barriers to independence," added Goodwill CEO David Twiggs. "That ties in directly with our overall mission, and we are very glad to be able to expand access to these programs with our new Career Center in North Adams."

The North Adams Career Center, which had a grand-opening ceremony on May 8, is based within Goodwill's retail store at 166 State St.

Anker explained that the space had previously been used for a "Suit Your Self" boutique, which focused on affordably priced workplace clothing and professional attire needed for job interviews and other work-related situations. A similar boutique which had operated at Goodwill's retail store on Dalton Avenue in Pittsfield has also been phased out.

While the boutiques are gone, Suit Your Self has evolved into a more comprehensive program of one-on-one counseling for job search, interview preparation and coaching, along with assistance on appropriate attire. This program is now offered in the North Adams Career Center and at Goodwill's headquarters at 158 Tyler St. in Pittsfield.

Anker noted that Goodwill is also working to establish a stand-alone Suit Your Self program in Williamstown by later this summer at a location still to be determined.

Group and individual programs

With some minor renovations, the North Adams boutique space has been transformed into an enclosed, private setting for group workshops and individual counseling and assistance.

"We had been doing some of these programs [in North Adams] for some time at various locations on a limited basis," said Anker. "We never had a permanent, dedicated location until now."

The North Adams Career Center is equipped with computers, printers and other office equipment for use by individuals seeking assistance with job search, resume writing and related activities. Walk-in hours at the Career Center are Monday and Friday from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. and Wednesday from 1 to 4 p.m.



Kathy Anker, director of mission services at Goodwill, says the new Career Center within the organization's North Adams retail store provides a dedicated space for one-on-one counseling and assistance as well as group programs such as the three-day Employability Workshop, which is held the first week of each month.

The Career Center is also set up with tables and classroom equipment for the Gateway to Employment Employability Workshop, a 12-hour program spread over three days that focuses on so-called "soft skills" – the interpersonal and communications skills that are important for both the job interview and successful integration into the workplace.

"They're life skills, the things we all need to work and interact with others," said Anker. These include communication, organization, teamwork, punctuality, critical thinking, social skills, creativity, problem solving, interpersonal communication, adaptability and friendliness.

She noted that the Employability Workshop complements the one-on-one counseling

and assistance offered at the Career Center, and serves as a suggested prerequisite for other workshops and programs that Goodwill offers. "It's not required for the other programs, but we strongly encourage people to do this first because it emphasizes skills that are important in all aspects of work and life," said Anker.

The Employability Workshop is offered in North Adams during the first week of each month on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. In Pittsfield it is offered on the third week of each month on the same daily schedule.

Another program offered by Goodwill is Gateway to Employment Retail. This is

a 12-week course (held three days a week) that is modeled after the National Retail Federation's Rise Up program. While this program focuses on skills needed for jobs and careers in a retail setting, Anker noted that these skills are readily transferrable to other similar workplace environments such

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as banking, hospitality and customer service. Those successfully completing the program receive Rise Up certification, which is nationally recognized.

Goodwill also offers Gateway to Employment Custodial Training, an accredited program from the Cleaning Management Institute that is held three days a week over eight weeks.

"Our Custodial Training program is OSHA approved and offers nationally recog-

nized certification where students gain the skills necessary to be employed in custodial, maintenance and housekeeping positions," said Anker.

The retail and custodial programs are currently offered only at Goodwill's Tyler Street headquarters. Anker noted that they involve 70-percent classroom time and 30-percent hand-on instruction and experience.

Supported by store operations

While Goodwill's employment programs and one-on-one counseling are technically open to anyone seeking assistance, most participants come via referrals from various state and local human service agencies.

"We prefer an agency referral," said Anker. "But we won't turn anyone away." She said those seeking information can email missionservices@goodwill-berkshires.org or call 413-442-0061 and ask for a member of the mission services team.

These and other programs are supported in part by revenues generated by the organization's retail store operations. Other funding comes from various grant sources from both the public and private sectors. For example, establishment of the new Career Center was supported by funding from the Northern Berkshire United Way.

Goodwill's retail stores provide a venue for hands-on training for individuals in the Rise Up retail program. They also create a number of job openings that are sometimes filled by individuals participating in Goodwill's workshops.

"We work with area employers and assist with placements," said Anker. "But we also see a number of job placements at our own stores."

With the addition of the North Adams Career Center and recent expansion of the organization's Great Barrington store (*see related story*), Anker said she anticipates being able to offer the Rise Up and Custodial courses and other workshops in those parts of the county in the near future.

"We would need to allocate space within the Great Barrington store itself, or find other space in south county," she said. "In North Adams, we now have the space with the Career Center, so it's just a matter working out logistics of bringing the programs up there."

In addition to enhanced access to these existing programs on a geographic level, Anker said Goodwill is also looking to expand the scope of programs that it offers.

"We're always looking to bring on new programs that meet a need in the community," she said. She cited a certificate program in human services as one example of things being considered down the road.

Overall, with the new Career Center and expansion of programs, Anker said she and others involved in mission services take great satisfaction in being able to help people break down the barriers to employment and independence. "The Goodwill spirit is really important," she said. "We really care about the people who come in the door." ♦

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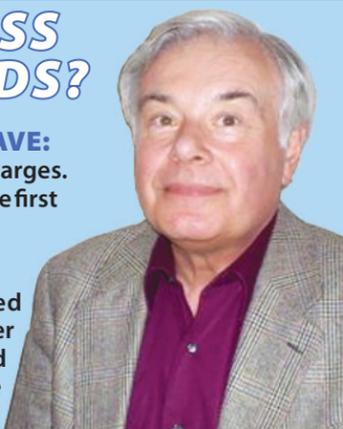
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