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St. Barnabas takes home surplus market upscale with shops

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Eagle Focus Editor

ADAMS TOWNSHIP — Beautiful Buys Thrift Shoppe will soon become delicious as well. As the St. Barnabas Health System's upscale thrift shop with locations in Adams Township and Valencia enters the second month of its second year of operation, plans to open a chocolate shop at its Valencia store in time for Valentine's Day are on schedule. It was a lack of space that prompted the opening of Beautiful Buys, said J.D. Turco, senior vice president and chief financial officer of St. Barnabas which runs retirement communities and clinical services facilities in Gibsonia and Valencia, as well as providing home care and hospice services.

Turco said for years St. Barnabas had been dealing with furniture and belongings of clients as they moved from their homes into the system's independent living facilities and then, perhaps, to its assisted living sites.

"They have to downsize quite a bit," he said. "Some go to nursing homes or pass away. The children sometimes say 'Please, just take it off our hands.'"

"We talked about how to manage our inventory for years from those leaving St. Barnabas," said Turco. "A lot of times we have excess inventory of furniture. We used to have a flea market, but it got to the point where it was causing storage problems."

The solution, he said, was to open the stores to offer the surplus for sale.

Beautiful Buys also accepts donations of gently used items from the public.

The larger of the sites, at 411 Route 228 in Adams Township, opened in November 2013 in a renovated farmhouse and barn. The thrift shop sells clothing, dishware, kitchenware and knickknacks out of the farmhouse and furniture from the barn.

Turco said St. Barnabas bought the five-acre property from S&A Homes which used the farmhouse as offices and the barn as storage as it built housing developments in the township, including Winfield Manor directly behind the thrift shop.

"It took some renovation," said Turco. "We had to put in pavement, lights and the parking lot. We had to change some exits on 228, and we had to block one exit off."

Turco said he anticipates the area becoming more developed.

"What we are looking forward to is across the street they're putting in a golf course. We

expect the area to become more commercial," Turco said

The operation as of the end of September was in the black, he said. It's operated as a nonprofit organization, Turco said.

"The money made at Beautiful Buys goes into our free-care fund for folks throughout the system that can't afford the services that are needed," said Turco.

"We are proud of the fact that the store has been open for over a year and we are already making money to put into the free-care fund," said Robin Taylor, St. Barnabas director of public relations.

The Valencia location opened in April 2013, said Deb Cochran, who manages both sites.

"It's amazing that we staff these stores with volunteers. Right now we have 36 volunteers," said Cochran, one of only two paid employees in the six-day-a-week operation.

Cochran said the volunteers are "residents at St. Barnabas and people that just want to give something back to the community." Volunteer Lorraine Hoover of Valencia, who staffs the furniture barn, said "I work five days a week. Basically I work back here. I sort, price and wait on clients."

Hoover, who has worked at Beautiful Buys since it opened, said, "I love it. I enjoy working with the public, helping them select things. You learn a lot."

The volunteers' efforts have helped to make Beautiful Buys' first year of operation a success.

Cochran said, "We are actually growing. On a slow week we get 80 customers. On a busy one, we get about 300."

She said she expects customer numbers to grow as more people become aware of Beautiful Buys.

Turco said St. Barnabas bought the Valencia location at 68 Dambach Ave., that contained two buildings.

"The front building is the (Adams Area) fire department, and the back building is the social hall that mostly sat empty for five years," he said.

St. Barnabas rents the first building to the fire department and has converted the old social hall into the Beautiful Buys location.

"It's right across from the Valencia ballfield," said Turco. "It's a little out of the way, so that's a challenge. It's a lovely store. People don't realize how shopper friendly it is."

He said it will be more shopper friendly when a planned chocolate shop opens by Feb. 1, just in time for Valentine's Day. The store will stock Hershey's, Saris and Pflueger's chocolates, Turco said.

Despite the 2.5 miles that separate the Valencia and Adams Township sites, Cochran manages both locations, splitting her time between the two.

"Every item in here is a donated item or they called to have it picked up. Our workshop is in the barn. We try to handle everything in the barn. It gets taken to the appropriate department," Cochran said.

Items are priced at about 30 percent of the cost of the items when new, based on national

averages, she added.

"If it is in absolutely pristine condition, we may get a little more," Cochran said, adding that all of the items for sale are in good condition.

"We refurbish it, clean anything that is upholstery. We polish everything up. If we put something out it can be taken into the house and used," she added.

Beautiful Buys also has a pick-up service for furniture.

Cochran said, "I believe that anybody who comes to these stores will fall in love with them. We had one couple who bought a dining room set so they could have Thanksgiving in their new house."

"I think the big surprise has been people have donated items, we've worked on them and they come back and repurchased the items," she said.

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