Three MCC Organizations Will Combine on Mt.Clinton Pike

By Rachel Swartzendruber
‘Burg Editor

On Mount Clinton Pike, three Mennonite Central Committee efforts will combine in a new facility to be opened in the early part of 2004.

The three services to be combined are the sale of fairly traded crafts and products, thrift store items, and the recycling of books. The first two are currently housed in the store known as Gift and Thrift, located on Main Street in downtown Harrisonburg. The latter, called Booksavers, is located in the Mennonite Media warehouse.

Gift and Thrift has been open for 21 years with over $1.5 million in profits. They function completely as a non-profit organization, giving all monies to MCC. “Our managers are our only paid staff,” said Nancy Yoder, chair of the board of Gift and Thrift. “We also have three work-study students [from EMU], which is a big help.” The gift portion is run by Sandra Rush and sells fairly-traded crafts from MCC organizations such as Ten Thousand Villages. The “thrift” section is run by Ken and Deb Layman and features anything from appliances to furniture to clothes.

Booksavers is relatively new to Harrisonburg, opened for one year. “MCC asked [the board] to start a Booksavers that would be under the Gift and Thrift board,” said Yoder. There are two other locations that are home to Booksavers: Hagerstown, Md., and Ephrata, Pa. The organization collects and recycles used books. The books may come from any source: schools, outlets, or individuals. “Textbooks are our biggest source for material,” said Yoder.

There are three categories for recycled books. Volunteers check the Internet for the value of the book. If the book is valued at five dollars or more, then it is posted on the Booksavers’ website for general sale – the first category. If the book is valued at less than five dollars, the book is put up for retail sale in Gift and Thrift – the second category. The third category is for books unfit for sale. These books are deemed “unfit” by their amount of wear and tear, or just because they don’t sell in the store. They are then baled to be used as recycled paper.

The new facility will have many advantages, including expanded parking space, a bigger space in which to work, better location (for EMU students), and the division of all three facets of sales.

“It will all be on one level,” said Deb Layman. “However, the thrift store will be separate from the gift section and Booksavers.” This will enable each facet to be run much more effectively, for example: keeping all the book collections and sales under the supervision of Booksavers.

The location will allow for an actual parking lot, as opposed to the shortage of spaces in downtown Harrisonburg.

“Parking is essential,” said Yoder. “I have to park in the parking lot across the street so that our volunteers and customers have room to park,” said Layman.

“The city bus will also go right by our front door,” said Layman. “That way we won’t lose our downtown customers.” Additionally, there will be room to store and bale up items such as clothing. “We bag up all our clothes and give them away,” said Layman. In the new space, they will be able to bale the clothing, making it more compact and manageable, and sell it to a salvage dealer. “We can make a little bit of money off of that,” said Yoder.

Although the board signed for the building last May, the new facility will not open until at least February of 2004. Volunteers and some paid laborers are working on restoring the building. “They just finished flooring, fixing, and the sign design,” said Layman. Painting should begin shortly.

“We hope to have more students as volunteers,” said Yoder. The board and managers hope to also increase sales due to the close proximity to EMU. “The students will be able to walk on down,” said Yoder.

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