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Good Business

The Little Sisters Sharing Place in Spanish Harlem is in business for a good cause. It offers bargains to people of limited means, but beyond that, the storefront is a gathering place where community is built, and it's a place where people get information on the Family Health Service operated by the Little Sisters of the Assumption. The shop's second anniversary was celebrated with taquitos and watermelon, balloons and a fashion show.

—Centerfold

Gathering Spot

CNY Photos by
Chris Sheridan

Little Sisters' East Harlem thrift shop is a place of good prices, good will

By JULIA MARTIN

The Little Sisters' Sharing Place is a thrift shop that "uplifts the neighborhood," said Frances Amando, a volunteer at the East Harlem store where customers can find great buys on clothing, household items and a lot more.

The storefront shop, located at 416 E. 115th St., draws most of its customers, and volunteers like Ms. Amando, from the neighborhood, known as Spanish Harlem or El Barrio. It is a project of the Little Sisters of the Assumption Family Health Service, which has been part of the community for 40 years.

Ms. Amando, a member of All Saints parish in Harlem, told CNY, "We have everything here you would buy from a regular thrift store, except appliances.

"The mothers look forward to stopping in, and the children do, too," she said. "The children can sit quietly and read or play with the little toys while their mothers shop, and then they meet other children and they play. It's like a family gathering."

Naomi Rivera lives a block away, and helps out daily, sorting clothes and pitching in wherever needed. She said she loves to volunteer because it helps the community.

Nadine Coqueran, who lives across the street, said she buys hats, blouses, skirts, dresses. "It's good clothing," she said. "A lot of people come here because it's not that expensive, and it's very close."

The store invited customers to a celebration of its second anniversary on June 18, and 150 people took up the offer.

Clusters of bright yellow balloons bobbed in the breeze at the shop's entrance. Inside, the neatly arranged shelves and racks displayed gently used clothing, household items, baby clothes and children's books at very low prices.

On the sidewalk, tables had been set up for trays of appetizing Mexican *taquitos*, vegetables, cheeses, wedges of juicy watermelon and cold sodas.

Elsie Sanchez, staff store manager who lives in the neighborhood, conducted a free raffle. Winners received gift certificates to the store, children's

books and other items. She read the winning numbers in English and Spanish. "One-eight-one, uno-ocho-uno..."

The culmination was a fashion show, featuring apparel from the Sharing Place modeled by a dozen customers and volunteers. Tots to senior citizens promenaded down the runway, as spectators called "Bravo! Bravo!"

Commentator was Trish Gough, assistant manager. With appropriate flair, she described each outfit and its price. Her spiel for beachwear worn by a male model: "Hat with visor 25 cents, T-shirt 50 cents, shirt \$1."

Among those who dropped by was Brother Charles P. Duffy, C.F.C., of the business faculty at Iona College in New Rochelle. He brought a half-dozen large bags of clothing collected by students in the campus ministry.

Sister Judy Garson, R.S.C.J., executive director of the Little Sisters of the Assumption Family Health Service on East 119th Street, took a break to walk down to the celebration. She told CNY that besides giving community residents a chance to shop with dignity—and very little money—the Sharing Place serves many other purposes.

"The purpose of the shop isn't to make money," she said. "It needs to cover its expenses, and it's doing that.

"The idea is to have people meet each other, discover how you get along, understand each other," she said. "It also becomes a place where people can learn by volunteering and develop their job skills and their confidence."

She said the shop is "very important for the people who don't know about our agency and what we can do to help, so we have information here about our services."

In the other direction, she said, when people come to the Family Health Service in desperate need of clothing, the staff can write a voucher and send them to the Sharing Place, preferably calling ahead and saying something like, "I'm bringing someone over who needs an outfit for every child."

Sean Lombard, director of finance for the agency,

said donations to the shop occasionally include women's designer clothes and men's suits with prestigious labels. "Our prime purpose is to provide quality goods at very affordable prices," he said.

The shop is open Wednesdays and Thursdays from 10 a.m. to 5:30 p.m., Fridays 10 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., and Saturdays from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Information: (212) 831-6642.



COOL TREAT—Wide-eyed Brittany King, 6, enjoys some ice cream at the party for the thrift shop's second anniversary.



MODEL BRIDE—Elsie Sanchez, store manager, adjusts bridal veil of model Grace Williams before the fashion show.



GOOD TIME—Guests of all ages enjoyed the festive anniversary celebration in front of the store.



OFF THE RACK—Customers scour clothing looking for bargains.



WHAT TO WEAR?—At left, a customer browses the stock of dressy and casual attire. Above, selecting garments for the fashion show, are models, from left, Juana Bendito, Nadine Coqueran and Frances Amado.