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Goodwill thrift store moves into Gateway Plaza

Tennessee Street site to be used for job training

By Rachel Raskin-Zrihen

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The new Goodwill Store in the Gateway Plaza. (Mike Jory/Times-Herald)

The Tennessee Street Goodwill store has moved across town, but the organization remains at the old building in a new role, an agency spokeswoman said Monday.

While the Goodwill's thrift store is now near Ross and Marshalls at 129 Plaza Drive in the Gateway Plaza shopping center, the agency's 1039 Tennessee St. location will soon serve as a job training center, spokeswoman Kimberly Scarfano said.

"We have a job services contract with Solano County, and we work to get people into the

workforce who are referred by the county," Scarfano said. "They get job training, resumé help, and we have 'a clothes closet' (for finding appropriate job interview attire)."

The program, which was launched in July in a space shared with a church, includes a work



The smaller outlet across town on Tennessee Street. (Mike Jory/Times-Herald)

experience program targeting welfare-to-work participants, Scarfano said.

"The old store is undergoing renovations, and how long that takes will depend a lot on the city with permits and all that," she said. "But we expect that to be ready April 1."

The change came as a surprise to Tennessee Street neighbor Gary Salvadori of Minuteman Press, who said he discovered the new store before he noticed the old one was empty.

"I was up at the Gateway Plaza and saw the store," he said. "I didn't know they were going to move. I was very surprised."

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Helping create a win-win situation, the move put the Goodwill store, which has operated on Tennessee Street since 1986, "in a more retail place," in the former Shoe Pavilion, Scarfano said.

At least two customers who have shopped at both sites, said Monday the new one's better.

"It's really nice," Vallejo native Walter Harris said. "It's like a regular retail department store."

Vallejo resident Fernando Sierra echoed the sentiment.

"Everything is well organized here and displayed well," he said

A dry cleaner-like counter for accepting donations will be installed in the new store location, Scarfano said. It's something officials "are excited about," she said. And customer volume has already increased, she said.

The new Vallejo location also allows organization officials to create a new look they're trying to bring to all their stores, Scarfano said.

"We want our store to look like a regular retail store," Scarfano said. And while the change began even before the economic downturn, it's become more important during the recession, she said.

"More and more people are coming to our stores now because of the economy, and we want them

to feel like they're walking into any retail establishment," Scarfano said. "We want even those who don't have a lot of money to have a nice retail experience."

The new look was launched in Goodwill's North Oakland store, and the other Oakland store now has it, too, she said. The Goodwill stores in Dixon, Dublin, Pleasant Hill and Vacaville sport the new look, while new stores going up in Brentwood and Fremont also will have it, she said.

"Eventually, we want all 24 stores to have the new look," she said. "We're trying to do a couple every year, because, of course, we can't do them all at once."

The idea is also to raise shoppers' level of awareness about Goodwill Industries. She added.

"It helps us remind people about why we're here," Scarfano said. "Most people know our name but not necessarily our mission -- that when they donate or shop here, that money goes for local job training and recycling and reuse."

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