

Humane Society Thrift Store Fights Crime

January 12, 2007

By Anne Centers | PagosaDailyPost.com

Walking into the Humane Society Thrift Store — my favorite place to shop in Pagosa Springs — I was surprised by the rearrangement of the merchandise and the new carpentry work. Up front, near the door, is a seven-inch high platform for the staff to check out customers. Sitting off to the side of the room was volunteer Peter Van Hercke, mudding the drywall for two new dressing rooms. Peter had been drafted by his sister to help out with the project; he said he does a lot of volunteer work for the organization. A few questions asked of the staff sparked my interest, and led me to a conversation with Humane Society Executive Director Robbie Schwartz — about the cost of shoplifting to a local business like the Humane Society Thrift Store.



Peter Van Hercke mudding the new dressing rooms at the Humane Society Thrift Store. *Photo: Anne Rachel Centers*

According to Schwartz, the Humane Society thrift store "loses an average of \$50 a day in the way of theft. Add that up over the 306 days a year that we are open for business, and it comes to over \$15,000. That would spay or neuter a lot of animals!" Schwartz said the Society is spending about \$4,000 on the whole remodeling project. The labor was contributed. The big ticket item was purchasing a new camera security system.

Schwartz told a story about a woman walked out with a big picture with an antique frame. She told staff she was carrying it out to the parking lot for her friend, another customer, but put it in her own car. The picture was of Jesus. Yes,

she was charged and convicted.

There are now security cameras in more areas inside and outside, near the entrance. The outdoor camera will help monitor donated items that are sometimes stolen while sitting outside by their doorstep. The store will also save money, hopefully, by not having to take other people's trash to the landfill; Schwartz says some people leave their garbage at the store, as a "donation," costing the organization an additional \$12,000 a year.



The new check-out platform is seven inches higher to give salespeople a better view of the store. Dressing rooms are nearby.

"Most of the project should be completed next week," said Schwartz. "It will take three weeks to get the carpeting in for the wooden platform. The raised area will make it easier for salespeople to see what people are doing in the store." Once the dressing rooms are finished, staff will count clothes before going in and after coming out.

The bookcases, loaded with books, are now under the windows on the opposite wall. The store looks bigger and brighter.

The electronic set-up one finds in bigger department stores, which could alert security of attempted theft, costs about \$5,000 — too expensive for the Humane Society.

Schwartz said that they don't use UPS workers who have been convicted of theft, to protect their volunteers, customers and merchandise.



The entire project will cost the organization about \$4,000, including new security cameras.

The new arrangement in the store gives it a more open feel. Women's pants are now on one long rack against the wall, making it less congested to look through the clothes.

Schwartz said she doesn't want to appear to be whining about the problem; she said she knows that many other stores in Pagosa have a similar problem. (That will be another story!)

Shoppers with an eye for bargains are welcome — as always — to come in, shop, and admire the new look at the Humane Society Thrift Store. Shoplifters, however, are encouraged to stay away!