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Popular hospital thrift shop celebrates 60 years Volunteers and hospital officials mark diamond anniversary

Ana Borruto | July 18, 2024



The ELIH Auxiliary celebrated the Op Shop anniversary with hospital officials at the North Fork Shack. ANA BORRUTO PHOTO

The Opportunity Shop in Greenport Village — run by roughly 100 volunteer members of the Eastern Long Island Hospital Auxiliary — just celebrated its diamond jubilee.

Founded in 1964, the Op Shop, as it's known, is Stony Brook Eastern Long Island Hospital's nonprofit thrift store. The ELIH Auxiliary, founded in 1905, donates all proceeds from Op Shop sales and other fundraisers directly to the hospital. While the shop is celebrating its 60th anniversary, it operated for 10 years from a small red building on hospital property before moving to its current home on Main Street.

Volunteers and hospital officials gathered at North Fork Shack July 15 for a luncheon to commemorate the anniversary. Op Shop chairperson Connie Connor thanked the volunteers for their years of hard work and dedication to the auxiliary and community service.

“We have remained steadfast in keeping up with traditions while changing with the times,” said Ms. Connor. “Not only are we a part of this community, we are in the community — the silver lining in all this is we make friends along the way.”

Locals and visitors who wander through the Op Shop can find bargains on merchandise including gently used clothing, household items, furniture, décor, books and gifts. While supporting the hospital is the shop's primary mission, it also shares its proceeds with homeless shelters, animal rescues and the Quannacut rehab facility at SBELIH.

Female auxiliary volunteers can be spotted all around Greenport wearing pink jackets, which have earned them the nickname "Pink Ladies." Male volunteers typically sport blue jackets.

Like many longtime volunteers, 82-year-old Barbara Koch first heard about the Op Shop from her girlfriends and said that when she was asked if she wanted to join them, replied: "What do I have to lose?"

"Lots of clothes, lots of runs to the animal shelter, lots of wonderful people," Ms. Koch said. "The fashion show was one of my highlights."

Carol Bradley, who said she is no stranger to volunteerism, just started volunteering at the Op Shop in June. Although the experience is still new, she said working and meeting the other members has been "a blessing."

In addition to raising funds through the Op Shop, auxiliary members also organize annual events throughout the year to support the hospital, such as the Dream Green Extravaganza, a car/cash giveaway; a Ladies Day on the Links golf outing; and an annual Italian Night Dinner. In 2022, Op Shop volunteers and their fellow auxiliaries achieved a record-setting donation of \$555,000 to the hospital. Paul Connor, SBELIH's chief administrative officer, said the auxiliary will play a crucial role in raising money for future hospital projects, such as a stroke center and a new emergency room.

"Everything the auxiliary has done is so unbelievable," Mr. Connor said. "As part of this community, the hospital is always getting donations and obviously we're providing services for almost 120 years, but to be able to also have this social mission is very important to us."

Ms. Connor added that she and the hospital administration are "so grateful for all the volunteers of the Op Shop's past, present and future," as well as for the community as a whole for their continuous support.

"It's evolved from a little red house on a property to Main Street [in Greenport]," Ms. Connor said. "Every year, we continue to grow."