

PROPERTY ROUNDS

Danbury store accepts donations of construction items for resale that benefit nonprofit group

By Richard Lee

Every day is Christmas for the staff at Habitat for Humanity's ReStore in Danbury.

The store on Austin Street accepts donations of home and construction items from contractors, retailers and homeowners for sale to other homeowners and contractors. It also attracts interior decorators who are looking for ideas.

Revenue from sales benefit the Danbury Habitat for Humanity's home construction projects for eligible families and other programs.

Among those donors is Fairfield-based Mayfair Construction, builder of homes mostly in coastal communities in lower Fairfield County. Its project manager is New Milford resident Leigh Leach.

"At the end of a project, we sometimes have extra material. It's heartbreaking to throw it into a Dumpster," said Leach, who met store director Paul Tocco about five years ago when he learned about the program. "When I found out about ReStore, I thought it was perfect."

The donations are tax deductible — normally for the client, according to Leach, who recalled removing kitchen cabinetry from a newly purchased house knowing that Habitat for Humanity would welcome it.

"The new owners didn't want it. The kitchen had been renovated only two years before," he said. "They were perfectly usable."

The cabinetry was donated to the Danbury store, where aisles are stocked with windows, doors, sinks and appliances.

"It keeps materials out of the landfills. You can always find tiles and windows. We also have (retailers) who bring in odd lots," said Fran Norman, executive director of the 11,000-square-foot store, as she walked past the shelves. She pointed out an impressive 17-piece kitchen cabinet assembly with a \$2,250 price tag.

"They're like new. We take top-of-the-line material that has been previously used. Here you have a new French door set for \$300 and interior doors in the box for \$90. But we aren't competing with the big box stores," said Norman, who noticed a ceiling fan still in the box, predicting that it will be quickly snapped up. "It's like browsing for



From left, Francine Norman, executive director of Housatonic Habitat for Humanity, Paul Tocco, ReStore director, and Leigh Leach, with the Mayfair Construction Group LLC in Fairfield, at ReStore in Danbury.

hidden treasures."

Norman also has been sure to post the store on Facebook and list some of its merchandise on Craigslist.

ReStore has the support of Connecticut contractors, said Joanne Carroll, spokeswoman for the Homebuilders and Remodelers Association and publisher of Connecticut Home Builder magazine.

"When builders are doing a remodel or demolition, they bring materials they won't be using to a store that it can resell to people at an affordable price," she said. "Some of these homes that are being remodeled are only a few years old."

Promoting a strong rapport between the store and area contractors and retailers is a key objective for Tocco.

"I make calls, and we try to establish rela-

tionships," he said. "When we moved here (in 2011), Lowe's donated 300 brand-new kitchen cabinets in the box. It was a model discontinuation. We get do-it-yourselfers, to people opening businesses, some contractors, interior designers and antiques dealers."

The donations keep the store's staff of 15 employees and volunteers busy.

While Tocco spoke, Danbury resident Nery DaSilva shopped for items to ship to Brazil, where he is finishing a home.

"There are bargains here. If I buy it here, it can be three times less," he said. "I'm going to send a container there in the next couple weeks."

A sign in the alcove at the front of the store makes it clear to any newcomers that they soon might find a deal when they walk through the doors — if they are lucky

enough to discover an item they need.

The wording on the chalk board read, "Slate shingles \$1 each or \$250 a pallet."

Clark Construction, a Ridgefield designer, builder and remodeler, has been a strong supporter of the Danbury Habitat for Humanity ReStore, and in October collected a variety of windows, plumbing fixtures, doors, cabinets and other materials through its annual Contractor Roundup benefiting the local ReStore.

The goal of the effort is to educate area contractors about ReStore.

"We've always tried to donate material. We hate to throw away anything," said Ross Clark, chief estimator of the business. "We donated a kitchen from a house in Ridgefield in early December, and the homeowner got the tax credit."