

# BUSINESS NEWS

## Bargain hunters, look what you're missing

Few seem to have heard of this obscure little shop

BY PHIL PFUEHLER  
rfjeditor@rivertowns.net

Off the beaten path of Main Street lies... The Closet.

"Most people don't know we're here," says The Closet Manager Linda Giardina. "We're not on Main Street where people are going by and can look in our windows and see all the clothes. Those who find us do so by accident or word of mouth."

"But where else can you go to find a real nice spring jacket for \$5, or a name-brand blouse for \$2? We're just in a bad spot, but we've got a great selection and the lowest prices."

The "bad spot" actually has a scenic view of the Kinnickinnic River and beyond that the new City Hall.

The Closet is part of Our Neighbors' Place and located on the west side of Main Street at 136 Riverwalk (the converted alley).

There's free angled parking on Riverwalk, including across from The Closet, but spaces are often claimed by downtown employees.

In any case, Giardina wants River Falls to know that whether you're poor, rich or in between, she's got clean, quality adult clothing at super-low prices, mostly in the \$1-\$3 range.

Her stock, rotated seasonally, includes women's dresses, skirts, jumpers, blouses, shoes, purses, boots, sweaters and jewelry in sizes from small to plus.

For men there's everything from jeans to dress pants, long and short sleeved shirts, T-shirts, hats, sweat-shirts, shoes, jackets, coats and more in all sizes.

Giardina also keeps "interview attire" for anyone, but especially for those trying to get back into the job market.

"We've got brands here from London Fog to Liz Claiborne and nothing's over five bucks," Giardina says. "For jewelry, we have necklaces, pins, earrings, pendants and bracelets. Most of it is from 50 cents to \$3."

Everything is donated, and The Closet isn't trying to make a buck.

Clothing-sale proceeds go to support the programs of the Our Neighbors' Place, which helps the local homeless and jobless population.

Giardina became part-time manager of The Closet in February. She says business is almost non-existent.

"We maybe get 20 customers a week," she said. "Missing what we have here is a missed opportunity."

Giardina has worked in retail all her life, including at a Walmart where she was a department manager.

She's brought her organizational skills to The Closet, giving it a makeover so items are easier to pick out.

"For women, we have a separate 'plus' section and everything is color coordinated," she said. "Everything for men is arranged by size."

"We're constantly updating the wardrobe as new things come in and



PHIL PFUEHLER PHOTOS

Manager Linda Giardina is smiling, but she's really sad that more residents haven't discovered the wee-little clothes shop she runs inside the Our Neighbors' Place Day Center, right next to Riverwalk Mercantile.

redoing the window display. I try to make sure it looks clean, neat and laid out for easy access. I don't want customers to have to dig around and search.

"What doesn't sell or is out of season is given over to the Salvation Army."

Giardina believes there's a niche for The Closet.

"There are still so many folks out of work, or who don't have enough money, or have teenagers girls needing certain things, or college students on limited budgets — whatever your situation, please come and have a look and see all that we have selling for a couple of bucks."

"No matter what your income, you're encouraged to shop at The Closet. Our place is little, but it's full of nice things. We're here to help folks, and the more we sell, the more it helps Our Neighbors' Place."

Clothing donations are also eagerly accepted at The Closet. Drop those off during store hours — 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. weekdays, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Saturdays.

"Right now is a good time to donate warmer-weather clothes, like shorts, capris, shorts, T-shirts, tennis shoes, sandals," she said. "Once it turns colder in the fall, we'll be looking for the winter stuff."

Giardina is choosy about The Closet's merchandise.

"I don't want anything damaged or soiled," she said. "I like everything to be clean, neat and would prefer that it be brought in washed. We iron every-



The Closet is not only well stocked, but its cheap clothes are clean, folded or hung on racks. They aren't faded, stretched out, or marred by holes or spots. Manager Linda Giardina declares: "I go through them to make sure." Volunteers Agnes Ruder and Sue Goblirsch also assist at The Closet.

thing so it looks fresh and neat." Purchases at The Closet can be made with cash or checks. Cash donations on behalf of The Closet or Our Neighbors' Place are also accepted.

## Finance committee buckles down to budget work



Sheila Harsdorf

BY JUDY WIFF  
regional@rivertowns.net

The Wisconsin Legislature's Joint Committee on Finance has held its hearings and begun the job of rewriting Gov. Scott Walker's two-year budget proposal, said Senator Sheila Harsdorf (R-River Falls).

Harsdorf, serving on the committee for the fourth time in her legislative career, said the 16-member panel began budget work April 26 and will

continue to meet every Tuesday and Thursday until it finishes.

Most of the Legislature's work on budget is done in Joint Finance.

The goal, said Harsdorf, is for the committee to complete its task by the end of May, keeping the Legislature on track to adopt a biennial budget by the end of June.

"We took up the 'easy' things first, but nothing is easy," said Harsdorf of last

week's progress. She said the committee began by meeting with several agencies to go over their budgets.

A major action April 26 was to accept a proposal for funding the counties' work with child-support collections, said Harsdorf.

Joint Finance approved \$4.25 million, about half what is spent by the state now.

Harsdorf said the committee agreed to that amount, which was recommended by

the governor, with the understanding that the Legislature will add more later if it can.

Child support collection has been funded with a two-to-one federal match, but the federal government has cut back on the money it provides.

"We're left with how much (funding) we can find," said Harsdorf. "The state has been trying to find other places to fill in the void."

She said legislators appreciate the value of the funding to

the counties and to the state as a whole.

"There's a tremendous payback for every dollar spent on child support," said Harsdorf, noting that every dollar spent by government on child support collections results in \$6.80 for families.

"Obviously this is going to impact counties," said Harsdorf.

She said the state is also

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