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Retail outlet, donation center to fill void created by Sears store's departure

With its grand opening weekend mere days away, the new Grafton Goodwill Store and Donation Center is abuzz with activity.

Construction crews were scurrying about earlier this week, putting the final touches on what store officials called a total reconstruction. Inside, an army of employees stocked shelves and spruced up displays.

"Everybody is really excited," store manager Rebecca Johnson said.

The Goodwill store opens Friday, Aug. 3, in the former Sears appliance center at 1715 Wisconsin Ave. The Sears store closed last fall.

The 21,400-square-foot building is being leased from Continental Properties Co., an important consideration for Village of Grafton officials when a conditional-use permit was approved because the property will not be tax exempt.

When the village approved the permit for the business, officials also required a payment-in-lieu-of-taxes agreement in the event that the nonprofit organization eventually purchases the building.

Transforming the building was a major effort.

"We gutted the entire store and created a donation center where the garden center used to be. We also renovated the front of the store," Goodwill spokesperson Cheryl Lightholder said.

"The renovation was simpler than most because they already had the polished concrete floors that we have in our stores and the space was very open and clear."

The renovation set aside nearly 12,000 square feet for retail sales.

As the building was being prepared for its new use, Goodwill officials maintained a sense of environmental responsibility.

"Green is very important to Goodwill, so when we are renovating we look at existing features and what we need to upgrade," Lightholder said.

“In the case of the new store in Grafton, we added insulation and improved energy efficiency by installing new rooftop units (for heating and cooling) and water-conserving plumbing fixtures. We also used low VOC paint, caulk, carpet and adhesives.”

Although the mission of Goodwill is to provide training, employment and supportive services for people from the Greater Milwaukee area with disabilities or disadvantages, Lightholder said most of the employees at the local store could well be familiar faces.

“When Goodwill opens a new store and donation center, we look to the community for new hires. Because the community is made up of a diverse population, our applicant pool tends to be just as diverse. We look for qualified applicants regardless of any barriers they may have,” Lightholder said.

She said Goodwill outlets generate revenue for a host of training and rehabilitation services, so customers should feel good about going on a shopping spree.

“Anyone can shop at Goodwill. We believe that everyone likes to find a high quality product – a treasure they’ve been searching for – but at a great value,” Lightholder said.

“We also believe that residents want to have a responsible method to recycle textiles and other household items. As a matter of fact, last year our Goodwill kept 76.8 million pound of clothing and textiles out of landfills.”

Retail hours will be 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. Mondays through Fridays, 9 a.m. to 8 p.m. Saturdays, and 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. Sundays.

The donation center will be available on those same days, opening one hour later than the store.

THE GOODWILL STORE and Donation Center in Grafton is set to open Friday, Aug. 3. The building will offer nearly 12,000 square feet of retail space and a seven-day-a-week donation drop-off center. Photos by Mark Jaeger