

BY SARAH ZOBEL

PHOTOS BY JORDAN SILVERMAN



The Clothes Exchange

SHOP TILL YOU DROP—
FOR A GOOD CAUSE

IMAGINE YOUR BEST FRIEND—THE ONE WITH THE REALLY GREAT SENSE OF STYLE AND AMAZING WARDROBE—invites you to her house to pick through her closet and help yourself to anything you like. While you're admiring the gorgeous Marc Jacobs coat and the jeans from 7 For All Mankind, she offers you a cup of Green Mountain Coffee or a glass of wine, accompanied by a delicious Vermont Brownie Company treat on a silver tray. Okay, so she asks you to pay for the clothes, but all that money will go to a local nonprofit. Besides, your friend has some brand-new clothes in there—stuff she's never even worn, tags from funky boutiques still on them. ▶



Top: Hollie Foley and Tre McCarney, loyal shoppers at The Clothes Exchange. Above: Women of all ages and sizes will find something they love at The Clothes Exchange. Photo by Ann Marie Vannucci, AMV Photography.





Carol Blatspeiler (left), crowned top shopper four years in a row, with her personal shopper Crystal.



There are many ways to get involved and support The Clothes Exchange. You can volunteer, donate clothes, and shop!

Welcome to The Clothes Exchange

The brainchild of Leslie Halperin, The Clothes Exchange began as a private closet-clearing event in 2001. Halperin invited a few friends to bring to her house clothes they were no longer wearing but that were still fashionable and in good condition. Just by shopping in Halperin's living room, those 15 women raised \$600 that they donated to The Windows on the World Fund, which benefited the families of foodservice workers killed on 9/11.

Fast forward to 2010: Some 700 area women enjoyed an evening at the ninth annual Clothes Exchange at the Doubletree Hotel—the largest event ever held there—and \$70,000 was raised for Burlington's King Street Center. Halperin's description of the event's "extraordinary growth" might be an understatement. Every year, the amount of money that is raised and donated has increased by roughly 50 percent.

"People get caught up in the excitement of the clothes and getting bargains," says Halperin, "but we exist to raise as much money as we can for the people who are doing the really important work in the community, working to solve social problems."

Although the original goal was to help nonprofits that focus on women and children, like virtually everything else about the event, that has evolved. Some of the organizations that have been chosen as The Clothes Exchange beneficiaries include the Vermont Refugee Resettlement Program, NeighborKeepers, and Vermont Works for Women. As part of the process, beneficiaries understand that they are required to play an active role by drumming up sponsors, selling tickets, and volunteering at the event itself.

"It was like your best adventure—frenzied at times, but always moving forward with a remarkable synergy," says Vicky Smith, executive director of 2010 beneficiary King Street Center. "It was a coordinated effort that brought together our kids, staff, and board in a way I did not anticipate—such positive team building working toward a common goal."



The Clothes Exchange is like a big party, a fun night out with shopping, wine, and chocolate! You have so much fun you forget you're at a fundraiser.

Get Involved!

Donations of clean, in-style clothing are always welcomed. For information on hosting a workplace or community collection, or a business-to-consumer event, check out <http://theclothesexchange.org>, and go to the "donate" link. Bear in mind The Clothes Exchange's rule: ***If you wouldn't let your best friend wear it, we probably wouldn't want it!*** Clothing collection begins in March.

Church Street boutique Sweet Lady Jane. Owner Rachel Strules says, "I'm proud to be part of The Clothes Exchange 'family.' I have been so moved by how clothing could be such a great way to raise money and what a difference it could make in someone's life."

This year, some 30 apparel sponsors will donate thousands of dollars in merchandise. That means shoppers will find that roughly 50 percent of the clothing at The Clothes Exchange is brand new. Children's retailers have also joined in, including Zutano, Isabean, and Little Luna Blue. And new for 2011, there will also be a few choice men's items for sale.

It's a lot to squeeze into one evening, so this year The Clothes Exchange's organizers decided to expand it into a two-day affair, to be held May 18 and 19. They're also moving to the Sheraton on Williston Road so there will be more space to enjoy the goods. Eager shoppers can purchase a "Shop First" ticket for \$110 and get first dibs, as well as the services of a personal shopper, on the

Generous Local Donors

Through the early years, the clothing on sale was exclusively secondhand. In 2006, the first year The Clothes Exchange was held in a public venue, Halperin approached Isis—a locally based national manufacturer of women's apparel—to see if they would consider donating items. They quickly agreed to take part, and they have maintained that generosity annually.

Another early and ongoing donor is



The Clothes Exchange Advisory Board (from left): Leslie Halperin, Leigh Samuels, Alana Lowry, Ellen Kresky, Deb Lichtenfeld, Paula Rea, Heidi Boncher, Elzy Wick, Kelli Shonter, Kelly Desantos, Anna Rosenblum Palmer. Not pictured: Nancy Westbrook, Kristin Devoe-Talutto, Lindsey Loucheim.

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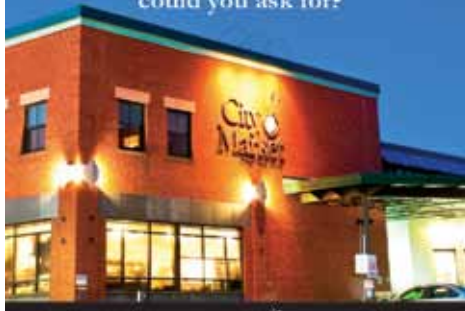
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18th. Main Event shoppers pay \$10 for a ticket that lets them in on the 19th. Merchandise will be refreshed for shoppers on the 19th and event organizers have secured more than enough inventory so that even latecomers will find something special. Tickets are available online (<http://theclothesexchange.org>); Shop First tickets must be reserved in advance.

The primary 2011 beneficiary is Spectrum Youth & Family Services. Because it is The Clothes Exchange's tenth anniversary, Spectrum will receive 50 percent of the profits; the remaining 50 percent will be divided among all prior beneficiaries, in recognition of their work.

"We're really proud, and we're excited to be working with Leslie and her team," says Spectrum's executive director Mark Redmond. "Having your organization selected for this is like having your city chosen to host the Olympics!"

The tenth-anniversary celebration began in January with a kickoff event at Magnolia Bistro; it will continue with a benefit at Bluebird Tavern on April 13. Shop First ticket holders, sponsors, and partners will be invited to a special celebration on May 18; there, a video with highlights from the first 10 years of The Clothes Exchange will be shown, and past beneficiaries will have a chance to share what The Clothes Exchange has meant to their organizations.

And then the shopping can begin. "We want to be a different kind of philanthropic organization," Halperin says. "We think of The Clothes Exchange as an innovative twist on philanthropy—a new way of harnessing philanthropic dollars for community benefit." And in the end, everyone comes out looking good—literally.

Donation Perks

The Clothes Exchange will be partnering with area retailers including Stephen & Burns, ECCO Clothes, and Sweet Lady Jane to offer specials to people who donate clothing through those businesses. Find more information at <http://theclothesexchange.org>. The Clothes Exchange will also be hosting a few "pop-up" shops during the summer at area locations, to be announced later this spring. Information on how to apply to be a beneficiary is also available on the website.