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News

Sports gear gets second chance

Sunday, August 23, 2009

By Diana Denner
Special to The Record

LATHAM — Many more helmets, sneakers, footballs, golf clubs, rollerblades, ski boots, and skateboards would be in the landfill if it weren't for Play It Again Sports that sells used sports equipment and gear.

"You can trade in the gear that you're not using and that's been outgrown and trade it in for used or new gear, take cash or leave it on consignment," said Dottie Vonk, the store owner. "Our philosophy is that we buy 'quality' used sporting goods. We do not clutter our store with gear that is worn out or dirty. Our customers know and appreciate this and usually go out of the way to make sure the gear is clean. We also always clean and disinfect every item in the store."

Located at Peter Harris Plaza, the showroom has 10,000 square feet of brand name items: new and used sports and fitness equipment, such as bicycles, kayaks, single joggers, life vests, weights, snowboards, protective gear, soccer balls and lacrosse sticks.

The ultimate goal in green is to reuse durable products and conserve natural resources. Vonk agrees that everyone should be living responsibly, taking count of what one has and what things truly cost.

"Our feeling is that by recycling the gear we are not only helping the environment, which everyone is concerned about these days," Vonk said. "We can also provide opportunities for kids to try out a sport who might not otherwise have that opportunity."

A part from a franchise that has 350 stores across the country, Vonk and her husband Steve have owned Play It Again Sports for 13 years. "Each PIAS store is different. We are consistently one of the top ski/snowboard stores and many of the other franchises don't even sell ski/snowboards," she said. "Same with hockey, this region is full of student and adult hockey players. Hockey is a very equipment extensive sport and you're lucky if your son or daughter fits the gear for more than one season."

Many local teams purchase their gear the store. As Vonk described, they come in and buy every used baseball bat or glove that's in stock.

"The Albany Athletics order gear from us as do many of the girls' softball and Little League organizations," she said. "We are also big supporters of the Tri City Valley Cats and donate a lot of baseball gear for the clinics they provide to local kids."

At this time of the year, baseball and softball gear are the big sellers, followed by golf and lacrosse. When the new school year starts, kids will come in to buy football, soccer, fall baseball and softball equipment.

The staff of five full-timers and seven part-timers all have experience playing sports, which gives them an edge over big sporting good stores in the area.

"We provide outstanding customer service," Vonk said. "The fact that we are a local, family business also gives us that 'Mom and Pop' feel."

In a throwaway society, green consumers know just how important "green" is in daily decision making, which becomes all the more apparent when times get tough, gas and food prices go up and credit tightens, said Wendy Gordon in an article titled "Real Materialism is a Virtue," in the National Geographic blog.

"A green consumer is fundamentally a smarter consumer who aims to live well, but also to live wisely," Gordon wrote. "She connects the dots, preferring to make more meals at home from fresh food produced and delivered with the least amount of fossil fuel, because she knows that it's best not just for her health, her wallet and the environment, but also for our energy security."

Many parents have told Vonk that they don't know how they would be able to afford to pay full price for gear and equipment if Play It Again Sports weren't around.

"We truly provide a service to the local community," she said.

Yet, their biggest challenge as Vonk said is being a small business owner in New York State. "Even with business being very good, the taxes, workers comp and health insurance make it hard to sustain the business in the future," she said. "Small business is the backbone of this country – it needs to be supported like big industry is."

For more information visit www.playitagainsports.com or go to their store located at 952 Troy Schenectady Road, Latham, NY. The phone number is 785-6587.

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