

Community Missions' business clothing closet to help individuals take next step

BY MICHAEL DEPIETRO
Tribune Editor

For nearly a century, Community Missions of Niagara Frontier Inc. has been a leading service provider for vulnerable individuals and families in Niagara Falls. For many who find themselves in positions of need, the organization is a vital source of food, clothing and shelter, as well as other crucial mental health, crisis and recovery services.

Yet, many seeking to take the crucial next step toward reassimilating back into the workforce face obstacles that have long gone overlooked.

Last year, during the Niagara County Community Service Agencies Coalition (NCCSAC), discussions were held regarding the lack of accessibility to work clothes and professional attire for those in need in Niagara Falls. While Niagara Community Action Program Inc. in Lockport has such a service, it isn't much of an option for those located in Niagara Falls due to a lack of no-cost transportation between the two cities.

"There's a lot of professional, workforce development help available. SUNY Attain offers free courses for Microsoft Word, Excel, Rosetta Stone and they also do workshops for resume writing and interviewing skills. But there's not a place for people to go and acquire the clothing necessary for an interview," explained Susan Dunlap Falbo, Community Mission's events and volunteer manager. "Community Missions - with the desire, space and experience running a clothing closet - decided to embrace this project. In this area where jobs are scarce, we want to provide free clothing and an opportunity for individuals to better themselves for when they do get an interview or they are hired."

The organization is now seeking donations of gently used business attire for both men and women. Items may include but are not limited to business shirts, blouses, dress pants, suits, jackets, neckties and handkerchiefs.

As with its traditional clothing closet, Community Missions' business clothing closet is located at 1570 Buffalo Ave., Niagara Falls. Those looking to either donate or acquire business clothes can contact Falbo directly at 285-



Macerich Senior Property Manager John Doran and Community Missions Events and Volunteer Manager Susan Dunlap Falbo on hand for a clothing drive during the Fashion Outlet's Earth Day event.

3403, ext. 2225, and via email at sfalbo@communitymissions.org. Due to the COVID-19 crisis, the clothes closet program is currently operating by appointment only for both donations and selections. Shopping is available 10:30 a.m. until 1 p.m. Monday, Tuesday and Thursday.

The business attire will be housed in a newly renovated space at Community Missions' central site (a converted hotel). Workers and volunteers recently remodeled the space with new carpeting, paint, and some fixtures donated by Fashion Outlets of Niagara Falls USA.

"Some of the best things come up by chance," said John Doran, senior property manager for Macerich (the mall's owners). "Casey Moyer, our administrative assistant, got in touch with Susan and, next thing you know, they're looking for retail fixtures. Well golly, you know, we've got some retail fixtures just lying around. So we said, 'Let's help out one of the best community organizations in town.' Things just kind of fell together and we hope it's a good relationship for a long time to come."

The fixtures were only the beginning of the partnership. The mall invited Community Missions to take part in its Earth Day event on April 24 where a subsequent clothing drive was held. Macerich also went a step beyond and offered to apply for grant funding on behalf of the nonprofit organi-

zation.

"We don't want to jinx it too much," Doran said. "It's one of those things if we talk about it, a lot (it might not happen). It goes through an approval process and it's limited funds, so we have to kind of hope for the best; but we're really looking forward to hearing in the next couple months if the grant application got accepted."

"We're proud to help out such a great organization."

Falbo said, "We're incredibly grateful to Macerich for everything they've done for us. They've truly been a blessing."

As is the case for many nonprofits, the pandemic significantly impacted Community Missions ability to host fundraisers. This year, the organization cancelled its formal Sweetheart Dinner, its biggest annual fundraiser, in exchange for a letter writing campaign in its stead. The agency's next major fundraiser is charity golf tournament on Monday, Aug. 2 (contact Falbo for registration or sponsorship information).

As such, monetary donations are still very much appreciated. For information on how to donate, contact the finance department at 285-3403 or visit www.communitymissions.org/donations.

Falbo said the biggest need to fill in the wake of the pandemic is a lack of volunteers.

"(At the start of the pandemic), we couldn't bring any volunteers into the mission. And now, I think a lot of people are still a little wor-

ried," she said. "So, employees have manned the programs that we kept open, which was the pantry - which people needed more than ever - and the soup kitchen."

As an example, she said Community Missions currently has two people - one an employee - who drive around collecting - and later unloading by hand - food donations from local businesses. Falbo said the truck can sometimes contain 5,400 pounds of food at a time.

During the Tribune/Sentinel's interview with Falbo at the Fashion Outlets Earth Day event, a young man named

Corey Zutell approached the table, completely unprompted, and

explained he used to be a regular volunteer at the soup kitchen. He went on to tell Falbo how much volunteering had helped inspire his decision to pursue a career in law enforcement, where he hopes to continue helping and engaging with the community.

"The best part about volunteering, you really realize that it's not about you. It's really about helping," Zutell said. "That's honestly why I want to go into law enforcement. Not to say, 'Oh, I'm this cop that has a gun' and all this stuff. It's really to think one day ... that you helped someone for no reason. Like, knowing that there's cops who've saved a kid's life and he's 8 years old and they go back 20 years and they're like, 'Hey, you're the one that saved me.' Knowing that that person now has a life; has a family; and you're the reason why. It's a good feeling."

Those looking to volunteer at Community Missions can call 285-3403, ext. 2225, or visit www.communitymissions.org/volunteer.

LEWISTON-PORTER CHURCH DIRECTORY

Lutheran Church of the Messiah

915 Oneida Street, Lewiston
Phone: 754-4944 Fax: 754-0903
www.messiahlewiston.org

The Reverend Ashlin Marchese, Pastor
The Reverend Thomas R. Mason, Pastor Emeritus

Online worship can be viewed at MessiahLewiston.org

Come worship with us Sundays at 9:00am

SHARE YOUR MESSAGE CALL US AT 773-7676

"Lori & Friends"



Pat Stack 1 & 2
So many tips - he needed 2 shows!

hosted by Lori Caso

LCTV Channel 1301

April 26th - May 23rd

Mon 3am, 10am, 3pm • Wed 4am, 4pm, 10pm

Thur 3am, 10pm • Fri 10:30am

Sat 3:30am, 5:30pm • Sun 11:30am, 10pm



THE GRANITE SHOP
402-1046

A Milestone Video Production. Made possible by funds from...

NIAGARA FRONTIER PUBLICATIONS
SENTINEL • TRIBUNE
DISPATCH • PENNYSAVER
wnypapers.com

TOPS
Friendly Markets
906 CENTER ST., LEWISTON

Shine Studio
Ask for Toni
297-0181

LaSalle Early Childhood Center 8477 Buffalo Ave., Niagara Falls, NY

Full and Half Day for 3 & 4 year-olds School Age Care for 5-10 year-olds

- Affordable tuition
- Staffed by Certified Teachers
- Developmentally appropriate curriculum
- 3, 4 or 5 day schedule
- Fenced outdoor play yard
- Large motor activity room
- Communication/Progress reports



Call for Your Own Personal Tour

283-5140 Ext. 306 for more information
www.LaSalleEarlyChildhood.webs.com



IN THE NEWS

Free COVID-19 testing event in Falls

Niagara Falls Memorial Center, along with the Niagara Falls Housing Authority and the Niagara Falls Health Equity Task Force, will conduct free community testing for COVID-19 from 1-4 p.m. Thursday, May 20, at the Packard Court Community Center, 4300 Pine Ave.

The testing is supported by the City of Niagara Falls Community Development Block Grant funds. PCR testing for COVID-19 will be provided at the May 20 session

and there will be no copays or deductibles.

Preregistration is not required and walk-ins are welcome. For more information, contact Samika Sullivan at 278-0228.

Niagara Falls State Park seeks private partner

Request for proposals calls for food, beverage and retail operator Niagara Falls State Park announced a request for proposals to provide concessions in the nation's oldest state park is now

available. The RFP calls for an operator to manage all food, beverage, retail and mobile concessions throughout the park.

The term of the RFP will begin on Jan. 1, 2022, and run through 2034 with an option to extend to a maximum of 20 years. The current operator is Delaware North Companies.

Potential respondents may contact Concessions@parks.ny.gov or visit the New York State Contract Reporter at <https://www.nyscr.ny.gov> to receive a full copy of the RFP.

Responses are due by June 23.