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WASHINGTON TOWNSHIP

Thriving local charity takes up bigger base

By Jessica Beym

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WASHINGTON TWP. — Around this time last year, Susan Rose didn't think the Mothers Matter gift basket donations could go on anymore.

In the 10 years since she formed the Lauren Rose Albert Foundation — named after her daughter who died in a car accident — Rose and her team of volunteers watched as their project grew from just 265 donated gift baskets of beauty supplies in the first year to more than 2,300 last spring.

"It had grown too big for our small committee," Rose said. "To say we were desperate was probably not an understatement. We knew we had to find a facility."

Her dream has finally come true. Late last month,

the Lauren Rose Albert Foundation moved into its new headquarters — the former Washington Township public works building on McClure Drive, near the police station.

"This has been a dream," Rose said Monday as she moved from room to room, showing the foundation's expansive workspace.

For the past decade, the group's core committee of about 12 active members would spend each year reaching out to schools and other community groups to collect women's health and beauty supplies such as shampoo, lotions, soaps, and perfumes.

Six weeks before Mother's Day, the committee and many volunteers would rent the Grenloch Community Center in Washington (See **MOTHERS**, Page A-5)



Staff photo by Tim Hawk

Susan Rose (not pictured), Founder of the Lauren Rose Albert Foundation, puts the finishing touches on a gift basket for Mothers Matter, a program under the foundation that provides gift baskets to mothers in need. The non-profit organization has moved to its new location, the former Washington Township public works building.



Staff photos by Tim Hawk

Susan Rose, Founder of the Lauren Rose Albert Foundation, smiles as she inspects a gift basket for Mothers Matter, a program under the foundation that aims to assist needy mothers.

Mothers: Wash. Twp. charity gains new home

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Township and work nearly day and night organizing the supplies, forming assembly lines, and putting together the baskets to donate to women who needed them.

They started out just giving the baskets to women at day care centers or shelters in Camden. Each year, the project grew with more schools and groups holding fundraisers to collect supplies, and more locations requesting baskets for women.

Rather than a mad-dash weeks before the special occasion, the foundation is now assembling baskets year-round.

The multi-room building gives the group plenty of space to spread out. There's a receiving room where baskets of supplies are first dropped off and a sorting room where volunteers go through the items and sort by color, checking to see that the products aren't leaking, expired or have price tags on them.

From there, the boxes are divided up into the color-coordinated rooms, and items are grouped together on the shelves. One entire room is dedicated to "spa" items, such as bath salts and body scrubs.

In the lobby — adorned with two donated couches, handmade curtains and a small workstation — there's



Volunteer Frank Jennings restocks shelves in the 'Green and Blue' room that houses 'spa' products for the charity.

a stack of colorful plastic baskets for the women when they come in. They can go from room to room, collecting which items they'd like to take with them. In the final staging rooms, volunteers assemble the bags and do one last quality check before sliding two roses inside the bag to signal they're ready to be picked up or sent out.

Today, those gift baskets are given to women and mothers of all ages, in nursing homes, hospitals, day care centers, and even veterans' homes.

When Rose started the foundation, she had been working for Camden County, and she knew the mission would be to help women facing all different challenges.

"Having worked in gov-

ernment, I saw women fall through the cracks, who didn't know where to turn for help," Rose said. "We knew our vision would be to find areas of unmet needs, where we as a small non-profit could really make a difference."

And they have.

A hand-written thank you note that Rose received is framed and sits on a shelf near the entrance to the building, reminding her of the work they do.

The woman wrote about how she didn't really look inside the bag of beauty supplies until she got into her car and was alone. It was there that she broke down and cried. She was so focused on working and caring for her children that she didn't even have time to think of herself.

"This is how we know that, what we do, it's more than just a gift bag of women's items," Rose said. "It shows people care. It shows that mothers matter."

The story is the same for many of the women that the Mothers Matter project has helped. But the Lauren Rose Albert Foundation goes beyond just that. They also provide grants and scholarships to women to go back to school, and now, those women can get help starting their careers through the foundation.

With the new space, Rose said, they're able to launch their "Suited for Work" campaign.

Clothing that is collected or donated is being hung in a dedicated room where the grant recipients can come and browse the racks for that special shirt or pants to wear to their job interview, Rose said.

What started as a little collection drive in the schools, where kids could offer their mothers a nice gift on their special day, has grown. Rose said her daughter, Lauren, would be humbled and honored at the work being done in her name today.

"She would be really happy," Rose said. "She would be really proud."

For more information about the Lauren Rose Albert Foundation, visit www.laurenlegacy.org/