



St. Mary's Auxiliary Upscale Thrift Store marks 19th anniversary, \$3 million sales milestone

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Athens, Ga. – For a thrift store – even an upscale store that specializes in high-quality used goods – it takes a lot of sales to add up to \$3 million. But that's just what the volunteers who operate St. Mary's Hospital Auxiliary Upscale Thrift Store have done since founding the store in 2007.

"The credit goes to all of our wonderful Auxiliary volunteers who make this store possible," said Angie Patterson, manager of St. Mary's gift shop and thrift store. "We are blessed with a dedicated and hard-working group of volunteers who are committed to raising funds for St. Mary's and who love operating the store, thanking our donors, and assisting our customers."

"Our volunteers are amazing," said Jeff Brown, St. Mary's Senior Vice President of Operations, at a May 8 event celebrating the store's \$3 million sales milestone and 19th anniversary. "We are forever grateful for your commitment and dedication to our health care ministry. On behalf of everyone at St. Mary's, it is my honor to say thank you."

"Our thrift store volunteers have fun and work hard, which is a great combination for success," said Kathy Ricks Auxiliary president. "Their passion and the generosity of our donors is what keeps our store thriving and filled with a great selection of quality merchandise. Shopping is an adventure because you never know what you will find, but you know it will be good."

The upscale thrift store was first envisioned in 2007. Then-Auxiliary President Wanda Lash-Sorenson noted that the Athens area did not have a high-end thrift store and felt it was a niche the Auxiliary could fill. The Auxiliary Board agreed, and a few months later, St. Mary's Health Care System Board of Directors gave its official consent. St. Mary's agreed to let the Auxiliary use a vacant storefront the hospital owns on Broad Street and provided labor from its Engineering staff to renovate the facility. A loan to cover the cost of renovation was provided by St. Mary's Foundation, and the store opened on April 22, 2008.

It was an instant success. In the store's first six weeks, volunteers sold \$17,268 worth of goods.

"An incredible amount of work goes into each sale," said Patterson, one of two St. Mary's colleagues who provide professional assistance to the volunteers who operate the store. "Donated items have to be solicited, checked for quality, cleaned, sorted, priced, displayed and sold. It's a very hands-on

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process, and we are always seeking additional volunteers who love working with the public and advancing St. Mary's healing mission."

From day one, the store has covered its own expenses, from keeping the lights on to paying back the loan that funded the initial renovations. After deducting all expenses, the volunteers have been able to generate approximately \$1.5 million for St. Mary's and its services.

"The funds raised through the Auxiliary's upscale thrift store have been a huge help to St. Mary's and our patients," Brown said. "Because of their support, we are better able to acquire needed equipment, improve access to care, and offset the cost of care for those who are uninsured or underinsured. Everyone who volunteers, donates to, or shops at our Auxiliary's thrift store helps us provide dignity, comfort and hope to our patients, especially those who are most vulnerable or in desperate circumstances."

St. Mary's Hospital Auxiliary Thrift Store is located at 2165 W. Broad St., Athens. Hours are 11 a.m. – 3 p.m. Monday through Saturday. The store is closed on Sunday and holidays. Volunteers are needed, and donations of gently used clothes, books, household goods, furniture, and more are welcome. People with large donations are asked to call about the potential for pick-up. Please visit the Thrift Store page at www.stmarys-health.org or call 706.389.2772 for more information.

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Many of St. Mary's Upscale Thrift Store volunteers pose for a photo at a May 8 celebration honoring them and the store's 19th anniversary