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Weeki Wachee thrift store hopes to help animal rescue efforts

By Beth N. Gray, Times Correspondent



Among frugally priced goods at Thrifty Dog, shopper Maria Escrit bestows begged attention on Jovi, a golden retriever mascot at the shop. Her friend Rita Hailey likes supporting pet rescue effort.

WEEKI WACHEE — With at least a dozen thrift stores throughout Hernando County, one more would seem superfluous. But the latest addition has customers shopping for a cause. At Thrifty Dog, the cause is paws.

"We fostered a Southeastern Guide Dog for 14 months," said co-owner Jeri Loffler, "and she made such a huge impact on our family, we wanted to do something to give back." The nonprofit business launched in January and says it will donate all proceeds beyond operating expenses to animal rescue and pet care organizations throughout the area.

Shoppers on a recent weekday afternoon said they came with pet support in mind.

"We're here for the animals," said Maria Escrit, a Nebraska resident visiting Rita Hailey of Brooksville. She bought a pair of glass serving bowls.

Hailey said she had worked for an animal rescue group, thus her interest in supporting Thrifty Dog.

Outside, a yellow banner shouting "Thrifty Dog" also drew Janice Timms of Crystal River and snowbird Linda Abrams from Maryland off Commercial Way.

Inside, Jovi, a 6-month-old golden retriever and shop resident with a pet-me attitude approached customers, tennis ball in mouth. Jovi is a shop attraction, along with 3-year-old Molson, another golden

retriever. They roam among the 5,000 square feet of dinnerware and kitchen appliances, couches and clothing, stuffed animals and games.

"Everything is donated," said Loffler, 23. "This community is so generous. People come in here and give, give, give. Everybody wants to support animals."

With all items coming in as gifts, prices are "reasonable," Loffler said.

Also boding well for the shop, Loffler said, is that the area has little commercial competition. The warehouse-like site housed thrift stores in years past.

As their guide dog brought the Loffler family together, so has the Thrifty Dog endeavor. Co-owners include Jeri's mother, LeeAnn Loffler, 51, and brother, Anthony Loffler, 26.

The trio depends on seven volunteers to help sort and stock wares, advise and help customers. They need more volunteers and goods to sell, along with cash to fill a gallon-sized jar at the check-out counter.

"We want everybody who goes out the door to know what our mission is," said Jeri Loffler. At year's end, the Lofflers will canvass customers to determine which animal rescue groups should receive its profits.

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