

## **HALLANDALE BARGAIN SHOP FILLS A NEED**

By Kenneth D. MacHarg

When a house of worship has extra space, it sometimes takes a creative mind to develop it into something useful.

At the Hallandale Jewish Center, member Ruth Castelblanco saw the recently vacated Judaica store space as an opportunity to raise fund for her synagogue's many projects and help people in the community.

Working with other member's of the synagogue's Sisterhood, Castelblanco has opened the Best Bargain Shop, a modest store that sells donated items at low prices to the area's needy residents.

"We have jewelry and silver, some clothing and other knickknacks," she explained. "It's all in good condition."

"The Sisterhood decided that there were a lot of people with items to donate," said Diane Chillag of Hallandale, the congregation's Office Manager. "They have a lot of household items and collectibles as well as some furniture."

Castelblanco said that the sale of the items at low cost benefits people in the community who can't afford to shop at regular retail stores. In addition, the proceeds from the store help support the congregation's many projects.

"Everything we take in helps," she said. "In addition to the cost of operating the synagogue, we donate a lot of money to Israel. Whatever we raise can help."

Like many other synagogues, the Hallandale Jewish Center operated a Judaica store for many years, selling items used by adherents in the practice of their faith or related to their heritage.

However, such synagogue-based stores are facing stiff competition from commercial Jewish supply stores selling the same products in area shopping malls. "All of the Judaica stores in synagogues are dying," Castelblanco said.

In spite of the closure of other synagogue-based Judaica stores, she said that she is not aware of any other congregation that has converted their empty space into another retail business such as her thrift shop.

The store's manager is not new to retail selling. She worked as a sales person selling clothing and jewelry in Chile before relocating to the United States ten years ago.

Castelblanco was born in Berlin, Germany, but fled to Chile with her parents during World War Two.

Castelblanco is very encouraged by the early success of her thrift shop. “I took in between \$300 and \$400 in the first three weeks,” she explained.

So far, she is not advertising the store, but is relying on word of mouth to bring in new customers and donations. “Little by little it is growing,” Castelblanco said.

The store is open Monday and Thursday mornings from 9 until noon at the Hallandale Jewish Center, 416 NE 8th Ave in Hollywood. Castelblanco said that as donations increase and more customers come to buy products, she will consider opening for more hours on additional days.

“We need more merchandise,” she said. “But right now, I’m optimistic about where it is going.”

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