

# idea corner

## Special Supply Store

A homemaker without an iron found one at the Christian Supply Store. The price: 10 cents.

An elderly man who lived alone needed clean, newer clothing. He found what he needed at the store priced within his budget.

A homemaker didn't have a knife to peel potatoes. At the Christian Supply Store she found knives, plus other kitchen utensils.

These are typical examples of what limited-resource families in Sumter County, Alabama, are able to buy in the county's Christian Supply Store, housed in what was for years the Masonic Hall located in the town square in Livingston. Coupled with this project, some 600 families in the county are eating better as a result of an Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP).

People use the services provided by the Christian Supply Store, too. At least 25 to 30 customers shop when the store opens up for business every 2 weeks.

This project didn't happen by chance. Neither is it a "fly-by-the-night thing." It began in 1970 and is still going strong.

The start of the Christian Store and its years of success is mainly due to community involvement. That is, people getting together, identifying problems, and then working together as a team to solve their problems.

At the turn of the decade, people throughout the county were talking a lot about community problems. The Sumter County Extension Council recognized one problem: the needs of the county's limited-income families. Mrs. Mildred Ennis, county home economist, said, "We found that the income of 75% of the families in the county—total population about 16,000—was less than \$3,000. Nutrition was a big problem, not only in the county, but also at the national level." The EFNEP program was started. Sumter County, under Mrs. Ennis' leadership, was also participating.

Local church groups also recognized the problems of limited-income families.

It's not known exactly who came up with the idea of the Christian Supply Store, but it was probably the result of a "brainstorming session" of some of the people who have been involved since the idea was "born." And that includes county agent Ennis and several people from the First Presbyterian Church.

Mrs. Ennis saw the store idea as a great supporter of the EFNEP program.

In one sense, the Christian Store is a recycling project—that is, taking "hand-me-downs" or "second-hand" items, which in many cases have filled up the storage space of many families in the county, and getting them into the hands of people who need them.

In the beginning, the church set up a "Save Boxes" program. Placed in home kitchens and strategic locations



throughout the church, the boxes became collections for jelly glasses, aluminum foil pans for baking, coffee and shortening cans for cannisters, and cardboard ice cream containers for wastebaskets. Through ingenuity, the women discovered that large bleach bottles could be made into funnels and bowls and margarine and whipped-cream containers could be used for storage. In fact, learning to do things like these were some of the lessons taught by program assistants in the EFNEP project.

The stock in the store grew and with the availability of an empty room to serve as a store, they began adding used clothing and other household items. Rather than giving away the "merchandise," they adjusted prices so that a good used coat could be bought for 25 cents. A blanket sold for 50 cents.

The demand grew and so did the Christian Supply Store. Within a year, it became an ecumenical venture with all churches in the county supplying merchandise and workers.

Mrs. Ennis said, "I made speech after speech throughout the county and prepared many circular letters helping promote this program. This involved informing limited-resources families about the Christian Store and telling people with recycling items who to take them so the store could make use of them."

Two ladies "man" the store each time. These women are from the various sponsoring churches in the county.

With the nickels and dimes collected at the store, the volunteer workers voted to: purchase a phonoviewer for use by the aides in the Extension Service's EFNEP program; provide 450 cup towels, one for each homemaker enrolled in EFNEP; and donate \$50 to the Brent Tornado Relief Fund.

For the past few years, the Christian Store has donated \$50 to each participating church for use in any mission project of their choice.

The operators of the Christian Store have only one problem: transporting needy people to the store. And they're working a

this problem. The Ministerial Association has a bus they hope can solve the problem.

"We could give these items away," Mrs. Ennis said, "but we have found that people take more pride in what they have if they pay something for it. For example, I have seen ladies spend an hour trying to *decide which pair of shoes they want to buy*. They wouldn't do this if the shoes were free. But since they're paying 10 cents for them, they feel like they need to spend time selecting the proper shoes. Then when they buy these items, they take so much pride in them.

"It's not unusual for a customer to select 15 items and the total bill to be less than \$2."

Since the EFNEP project started in Sumter County in 1969, 325 families have already graduated. Right now about



300 families are enrolled. In this program, nine program assistants meet twice a month with Mrs. Ennis, at which time she gives them a simple lesson on food and nutrition. This lesson might be on how to convert shortening cans into a cannister set. Then the aides visit their designated families and provide them with this information.

Mrs. Ennis said, "The Christian Store has worked hand-in-hand with our EFNEP Program.

"And here's how: Our business in Extension is as an educator, not a provider of goods and services. However, very low-income families must have the basic necessities of life before they accept our educational programs. If you have so little that survival is paramount, then we in Extension must peddle our educational information elsewhere.

"But if a program assistant says, 'Look, you can get many of the things your family needs for almost nothing at the Christian Supply Store,' then the homemaker, without a loss of pride, can shop freely for what she needs. We have observed that they are shrewd shoppers even if the item is only 10 cents."

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