

MILLINOCKET - More than a dozen St. Martin's Thrift Store volunteers participated recently in a fact-finding trip to a Caribou thrift shop to study ways in which to better serve St. Martin's Katahdin area customers.



Volunteers from St. Martin's Thrift Store toured the Catholic Charities Maine Thrift Store in Caribou recently.

The St. Martin volunteers visited the Catholic Charities Maine Food Bank and Thrift Shop at 14 Old Van Buren Rd., Caribou, spending more than three hours touring the facility, talking with Manager Dixie Shaw, and exploring ways in which the two store might possibly cooperate with one another.

The volunteers were told the Catholic Charities Maine's main focus is serving as a non-denominational food bank, servicing 24 food pantries throughout Aroostook County with the thrift shop aspect helping to offset the costs involved in being a food bank.

"It costs us a lot of money to give away free food," Shaw explained. She emphasized that the non-denominational thrift store is operated for the sole purpose of raising funds to operate the food bank. Sixty five percent of the money for the food bank operation comes from the thrift store, according to Shaw. The food bank also has been the recipient of grant money, she said.



Dixie Shaw, right, manager of the Catholic Charities Maine Thrift Store and Food Bank in Caribou explains her store's operation to St. Martin's Thrift Store Manager Jayne Jones.

Among the goods the Caribou thrift shop sells are: building materials, appliances, jewelry, baskets, household items, sporting goods, books, baby items, and furniture. Only a limited amount of clothing is featured at the store.

In 2008 Catholic Charities Maine Food Bank served 33,214 people through the 24 pantries it distributes food to through its Caribou warehouse. The 24 food pantries encompass a large area, from St. Francis in the north to Sherman in lower Aroostook County.

The thrift store and food bank operation are housed in a former hardware store warehouse.

The motto of the Caribou thrift store is "You get a good deal while helping someone get a good meal."

The materials the Caribou thrift store offers for sale are donated by individuals, homeowners, businesses, contractors, and organizations.

Shaw and key members of her staff are planning a trip to Millinocket to visit St. Martin's Thrift Store and view operations there.

Many of the volunteers participating in the fact-finding trip spent the three-hour return trip home to Millinocket discussing methods and ideas they could implement to better serve customers and increase store efficiency.

St. Martin's Thrift Store has been serving the Katahdin area for more than 25 years, is currently located at 112 Maine Ave. and has a roster of more than 20 volunteers.