

Storehouse West Virginia in the News

Storehouse makes connections for nonprofit groups



wvgazette.com

April 21, 2009

Chip Ellis

John deBlecourt runs the Storehouse as part of his duties with Believe in West Virginia. He's helping Tony Gordon of Charleston's Grace Bible Church, who picked up free Gatorade and other supplies for the church's after-school program.

By **Sara Busse**

CHARLESTON, W.Va. -- 26,500 cans and sticks of Axe deodorant.

8,200 square feet of blue ceramic floor tile.

123,500 bottles of body wash.

100 12-foot Formica kitchen countertops.

10,700 bottles of shampoo.

14,700 packs of Extra Cool Green Apple gum.

6,600 containers of Hidden Valley salad dressing.

75 pedestal sinks.

62,000 bags of Lifesavers Gummies candy.

150 new men's suits, 300 sport coats, and 450 dress shirts.

These are just a few of the items recently unloaded from tractor-trailers into the warehouse on Hansford Street run by Storehouse, an offshoot of [Believe in West Virginia](#).

Those products are then reloaded, in smaller quantities, into pickup trucks, car trunks and vans to help the less fortunate across the state.

Formed in 2002 as a faith-based nonprofit group, Believe in West Virginia's focus is to create economic opportunities by rming the business culture of West Virginia.

Making connections is what Director John deBlecourt says the group does best.

Storehouse West Virginia in the News

The volunteers at Storehouse break down large donated lots into manageable portions and give them to local charities. The lots they receive are just portions of the vast quantities of donated materials received by "bigger brothers and sisters" in larger cities, according to deBlecourt.

"There's a large organization in Kentucky, for example, that has a huge warehouse," deBlecourt explained. "They divide up the quantities they receive, and then send smaller truckloads to us."

Items vary each month. The group doesn't focus on food products but will accept them, as they don't turn anything down.

"We've had fun fur -- cases of 'hairy yarn,'" deBlecourt said.

"One woman took the yarn and made scarves with it. She brought one to me," he said, holding up a long, striped scarf.

"Now we can show other groups what they can do with this stuff. It's all about connections.

"We work to foster relationships," deBlecourt said. "We've helped 360 organizations to get goods that they might not have otherwise been able to have. Thirty-eight counties have been affected so far."

During its first three years of operation, the Storehouse gave away more than \$3 million in goods.

Storehouse started in 2005 in the former Dondale Furniture location in Cross Lanes, then moved to its Hansford Street space last year. They work with charitable organizations or with churches to give away the items they receive.

"We must give it away. We can't sell, barter or trade it," deBlecourt said. "We just give it away. ... We ask the groups to use them here in West Virginia."

Visitors must make an appointment with deBlecourt to visit the warehouse.

There are two categories of materials given away by the Storehouse. First, there are in-kind gifts such as the deodorant and Lifesavers candy. These are free for the asking. For building materials, the organization asks for donations, if possible, to offset costs.

"They give us what they can -- and it's only a fraction of what these items would cost at a retail location," deBlecourt said. Believe in West Virginia supports itself through donations.

"Calling it a shoestring would be a stretch," deBlecourt laughed.

DeBlecourt enjoys the give and take of the job.

"You have to keep the inventory moving, but you also have to keep some things back, so that everyone has a chance to get something," he explained, as he strolled past pallets of Simple Harvest Apples with Cinnamon cereals, which are stacked

Storehouse West Virginia in the News

next to several cartons of Peeps candy and Sunsilk Crème Rinse and Bertoli Summer Crushed Tomato and Basil pasta sauce.

Groups can visit the warehouse once every 30 days.

"We got these great nutritious snack packs from Target," he said. "We wanted to make sure those go to schoolkids who might not get a nutritious meal on the weekends. They give them out in the after-school programs."

Tony Gordon of Grace Bible Church on Charleston's West Side recently gathered supplies for his after-school program. He loaded his cart with snacks, craft supplies and bottles of Gatorade.

"We've been blessed to have this partnership," Gordon said. "We've gotten books, clothes -- so many things."

DeBlecourt told visitors a story about some of the donated clothing:

"We had some tuxedos come in, and we wondered what would happen to them. Then we had really nice dresses from Dress Barn come through. Well, all of those items made it to churches that made it possible for some kids to go to the prom who probably wouldn't have been able to go."

Al Chafin and Don Bumgarner, both of Logan, are frequent visitors to the Storehouse. They have used numerous items to refurbish Victory Freewill Baptist Church in Pecks Mill, including six pallets of dark blue ceramic tile for the foyer of the church, located in the former Mill Creek Elementary School.

"We brought six pickup trucks to get that tile, and all of the mastic and unsanded grout to install it," Chafin said. "We've used more than 100 carpet squares, light fixtures -- this place has been a godsend to us."

The men were picking up solid wood doors on a recent trip, and Chafin said he had priced them at \$800 apiece at a home-improvement store.

"We couldn't afford that."

Believe in West Virginia is hosting a "West Virginia Day of Action" from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. on April 25. The major focus of the day will be to fix, paint, build or clean homes in the community. DeBlecourt calls this a "Backyard Mission Project," encouraging church groups that in the past have traveled long distances to consider working on a local project.

The Storehouse is open by appointment only 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday and Thursday. To set up an appointment or to join the "Day of Action," call John deBlecourt at 304-552-7601 or e-mail john@believeinwv.org.

Reach Sara Busse at sara.busse@wvgazette.com or 304-348-1249.



Chip Ellis

Al Chafin (left) and Don Bumgarner of Victory Baptist Freewill Church in Pecks Mill check out a supply of faucets at the Storehouse on Hansford Street.