

Stir Up A Media Frenzy

By Melissa Wierenga and Brenda Hofman

How can you catch the media's attention and gain valuable publicity? Hopefully you will be able to incorporate some of the following ideas at your store to get FREE PRESS, just as we did.

We have a great business at *Bargains Galore Thrift Store*, but we really wanted to take our store to the next level. We created and held special events that gained a tremendous amount of media attention. To preface this first event, you need to know that our non-profit store is only open Thursday – Saturday, with "new" merchandise stocked Monday – Wednesday. So, the main draw for the event was that we opened up a day earlier and had night owl hours to shop our newly stocked merchandise and fresh displays.

Our huge media boost began last Fall with our first annual Moonlight Madness Sale. It was held on a Wednesday evening from 7 to 11 pm with everything in the store 50% off. It started off with a bang as 360+ customers waited in line for our doors to open. The spectacle of hundreds of shoppers lined up at a "thrift store" jump-started our media frenzy.

The following week, a Volunteer Appreciation Night was held to honor our army of volunteers. Nearly 200 volunteers attended this exciting and fun evening of recognition, food, fellowship and entertainment. This night landed us another dose of media attention.

A week and a half later, we held an American Red Cross Benefit Day. All proceeds from that day's sales were given to aid Hurricane Katrina victims as well as our local Red Cross chapter. We were excited to help those devastated by the hurricane, give back to our own community and make a difference in the lives of others. This event added another "WOW" factor to our store that the media caught on to.

These three events really sparked the media's attention. After the press covered each specific event, several reporters followed up with us wanting more information about our store and its' success. The newspapers then published extensive stories about *Bargains Galore*, including photos, customer quotes, and front page coverage.

Then, we received the granddaddy of all phone calls. We hit the jackpot! *InSpire Magazine*, a magazine covering southeastern Wisconsin, asked us and our store to be featured on its' front cover! WOW! What an opportunity to get our name out there FREE of charge! The focus of *InSpire's* January edition was volunteerism and the editor selected *Bargains Galore* as the perfect fit. We were featured on the front cover, in addition to a two page, well-written story about the volunteers and success of *Bargains Galore*.



The results of the media whirlwind produced an amazing amount of exciting publicity. Through all these events, we received a total of 11 different stories featured in four newspapers, magazines and radio in a three month time period—FREE of charge. What more could you ask for? We couldn't have paid for better advertising if we wanted to!

As a result of all the great events and fantastic publicity this past fall, our business has been on a huge upward swing. Our customer growth has been phenomenal and sales are booming! We are thrilled at the outcome of this free media frenzy.

So, how can you and your store grab the media's attention?

- ✓ Create hype - Plan & advertise special events.
- ✓ Go Big! - Be willing to put lots of time, hard work, thought, and effort into the events to achieve the maximum "bang."
- ✓ Be different / unique.
- ✓ Give back to your community.
- ✓ Build relationships with the media - Submit press releases and photos; be sure to follow-up with thank-you notes.

These are just a few of the ideas that have worked wonders for *Bargains Galore*. We realize that one of the keys to our successful media run was the "POW" factor, having a lot of events in a short period of time. What ideas can you come up with today to create free press for your store? You might be surprised what you can "stir up!"

Bargains Galore Thrift Store, in Waupun, WI, is a non-profit thrift store. They opened in 2001 to support Central Wisconsin Christian Schools. Melissa and Brenda manage the 13,000 sq. ft. store along with their staff of 200 volunteers. The ever-growing customer base at *Bargains Galore* goes far beyond their small town of 8,000 people; it reaches out to the surrounding communities as well. Melissa and Brenda have been members of NARTS since 2005. They attribute much of their "new found" success to the NARTS Conference they attended in San Diego and other NARTS members they have befriended along the way.