

Entertainment shouldn't break you

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WANT MORE?

While the best things in life are free, most pastimes have a price tag.

Recreation is an essential existence-enhancing experience. Be it a hobby, sport, avocation or leisure pursuit, funding your fun is often significant.

For shrewd shoppers and canny consumers, it doesn't have to be.

With some sleuthing and a willingness to unshackle yourself from brand bondage and retail snobbery, traditionally expensive extra-curricular activities can be affordable.

Why pay \$100 or more for new golf shoes when a \$20 bill can get you a great pair? Looking for quality ski boots or ice skates at a fraction of the original retail price? How about books, DVDs and video games for the cost of the tax on new products?

York Region abounds with affordable merchandise and activities.

"We're the ultimate treasure hunt," Value Village store manager Kerry Brice said of the 16,000-square-foot Newmarket outlet that sells a profusion of gently used and new donated items.

"People don't realize how much new stuff we get. Every day, we have a minimum of 5,000 items in the store. We're like a huge, organized garage sale."

Touring the tidy cavernous store, Ms Brice, a 15-year veteran of the merchandising concept supporting charitable partners, explains the Value Village business model began in 1954. Today, 120 charities share more than \$100 million annually from proceeds generated at a growing chain of stores. The Newmarket outlet assists the Canadian Diabetes Association.

For the budget conscious, it's nirvana.

Sporting goods, including used but fully functional adult ski boots for \$9.99 and golf clubs starting at a few dollars, are available, along with sports shoes, clothes and exercise equipment. There are roller blades for less than a saw buck, tennis rackets for a fin and accessories for peanuts.

Always popular with local bargain hunters and those wanting to optimize resources, the store's customer

▶ **PLAY** - positive leisure activities for youth program and summer day camps, call 1-888-703-5437, option #6.

▶ York Region Parks and Recreation, york.ca

▶ Coupons and attractions, yorktourism.com

▶ Value Village, 130 Davis Dr., Newmarket, 1-905-953-1344. valuevillage.com

▶ Salvation Army Thrift Store, 130 Davis Dr. Newmarket, 905-830-1656 and 10620 Yonge St. Richmond Hill, thriftstore.ca

▶ Care & Share Thrift Shop, 6240 Main St., Stouffville, 905-640-1410.

count has spiked in the recent recession, Ms Brice said. The store is also becoming a magnet for visiting value seekers.

One Beeton mom of four children aged three to 19, Allison Curtis, makes regular trips to Newmarket from Simcoe.

"I've been to many Value Villages and this one's the best," she said. "In the past, we've come here for skates, soccer shoes and we even got a video game controller. The draw is the pricing."

Ditto for Ajax resident Linda Gates, who, tongue in cheek, says she's no relation to Bill.

"It's the bargains, selection and sizes and there's a lot of seasonal sports items, too," she said. "I'm definitely a repeat customer."

First-time patron Jamie Emond from Courtice near Oshawa said he was impressed.

"The store's nice and bright, well organized and there's variety," he said. "I'm coming back."

Value Village newbie Chantel Quesuel recently moved to York Region from Ottawa. She was shopping for her two children, ages five and eight.

"You have to know your labels," she said, displaying an outfit tagged at \$6.99. "This is a \$100 brand."

Ms Quesuel admitted she's an avid and smart shopper, a talent she estimates saves her family thousands a year.

In the same plaza is the Salvation Army Thrift Store, a repository for donated items, all working and



STAFF PHOTO/MIKE BARRETT

Kris McGowan, owner of Play It Again Sports on Yonge Street in Richmond Hill, says the most popular used items are hockey and figure skates.

in fine condition. Inventory rotates constantly and good sporting buys are a staple.

If saving specifically on sports gear is the objective, check out Play It Again Sports in Richmond Hill. About 40 per cent of the inventory is used and that will cut your costs in half, compared to new, owner Kris McGowan said.

"The value issue has been big in the last few years," he said. "There's been a noticeable difference with more people bringing in used equipment with the intention of buying new and other used items."

The biggest used sellers are hockey and figure skates and skis, he said. That equipment accounts for up to 70 per cent of trade-ins. Outfitting a hockey player can cost more than a \$1,000.

With kids growing out of gear

annually, it makes sense to trade up and in on used gear, he said.

The only new hockey paraphernalia sold are sticks and undergarments.

In business 13 years, Mr. McGowan offers three options to customers who bring in used equipment — you can get a store credit, sell it outright or put it on consignment.

Added this year are new and used bicycles, including toddler bikes, high-end racers and off-road machines.

With a bit of initiative and inventiveness, you can save major dollars on leisure in the region.

Our public libraries loan first run DVDs and CDs free, along with books. York Region tourism offers discount coupons for major attractions, including museums, galleries and recreation centres.

MONEY WISE

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