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## Tight-knit community

Cohoes shop's customers rally to provide for young and old

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There's a little knit shop on Remsen Street in Cohoes with an unmistakable warmth, palatable as a knitted mitten pressed against a frozen nose.

There's a plastic tub on the floor that holds old, hard-to-find patterns that customers can take in exchange for dropping a donation in a jar. Over the past three years, the shop has sent more than \$300 from the jar to the Cohoes Community Center.

On the floor nearby, up against another post, is a barrel heaping with baby clothes. People just drop them off because they know the stuff will be put to good use.

"I tell them if they have anything to give us that they want to go to charity, just to give it to us and we'll get it to the right place," said shop owner Barbara Hildreth, who opened BeauKnits three years ago after retiring as principal of nearby Harmony Hill School.

People come in and drop off yarn, too. Hildreth gives it to some elderly knitters she knows who don't have much money, but who gladly make baby hats and sweaters. They also send donated yarn to senior centers, where knitting is a favorite day care activity.

"They love getting the yarn," said Celeste Stepanowski, program director for the adult day care program at Cohoes Senior Center. "One woman made mittens for everyone who comes here, and another woman made seven afghans. We raffle them off or sell them at their Christmas fair."

### Busy hands

A Christmas tree in the shop window is sweetly decorated with baby bonnets, sweaters and booties as well as blankets, scarves, mittens and berets. The tree branches also have pieces of paper pinned to them with the names of some of the places that benefit from the shop's busy hands.

All the city's elementary schools, senior centers and maternity wards get knitted treasures from a legion of caring women who make up the Friday Nite Knitters. The group's numbers vary from week to week, from eight or so to as many as 35.

"Charity, to me, is very important," Hildreth said. "We have a gift, and it's important that we share that with other people in our community. I think that we all need to open our eyes and see that there is a bigger world around us."

Besides making mittens, scarves and hats for schoolchildren, the shop's knitting to-do list includes Unity House, Troy; The Eddy, Cohoes; Cohoes Senior Center; Albany County Nursing Home; Cohoes Head Start; the birthing centers at St. Mary's in Troy, St. Peter's in Albany and Albany Medical Center; Clay Hill Farms for developmentally disabled adults in Hudson; and Albany's Community Cradle for pregnant teenagers.

### Cancer cause

BeauKnits this year also worked with a group of neighboring knit shops to make scarves and hats for the American Cancer Society's "Look Good, Feel Good Program," which helps restore the self-image of women battling cancer.

In that endeavor, Hildreth's shop joined Eastside Weavers and The Yarn Depot, both of Troy, and Wool 'n Word of West Sand Lake, to make close to 200 scarves and chemo hats, according to Michelle Terry, director of corporate relations for the Loudonville office of the cancer society.

"If you observe the patients, they are a little reserved when they first come in, and then you witness this transformation," Terry said. "They start trying on the hats and scarves and wigs and makeup and they start feeling good about themselves. They all end up laughing.

"And the scarves they gave us weren't the kind your grandmother might have worn. They were very trendy-looking scarves, the kind you would find in a boutique."

Hildreth said helping the cancer patients touched many of the knitters who have seen friends and family members battle the disease, a factor that made their work lighter.

"The thing is, you are thinking about a cancer survivor the whole time you are knitting the scarves and hats," Hildreth said.

One of the Friday Nite Knitters, Phyllis Albericci of Latham, says of Hildreth: "Barbara has an incredibly big heart. She's so deeply involved in church and school. This seems such a natural way for her to do this charity knitting, and she's very good at identifying where the needs are."

#### Good feelings

Pat Sweeney has been a knitter since she was a Girl Scout and used to volunteer as a knitting teacher at Harmony Hill. She ended up teaching Hildreth, her friend of 30 years, to knit, then helped her with plans to open BeauKnits, a name picked in honor of a Cohoes weaving mill named Beaunit that operated in Cohoes from 1934 to 1953.

"I was a knitter when no one else did it, so I was thrilled when she said she wanted to learn, and now the shop and the knitting has just mushroomed," said Sweeney, who works at the shop.

Besides the good feelings that come with helping others, a bonus for Sweeney has been the women she has met doing it.

They are all nurturing and derive a peacefulness from knitting for others, said Sweeney, who was moved to knit things for schoolchildren.

"I was shocked by the way some of the kids came to school in winter months," she said. "No hats, no mittens. I love making mittens and hats for the little ones. It's a good thought for me to think they can all have them."

School nurse Cindy Dawkins is the keeper of the stash of mittens, hats and scarves at Harmony Hill.

"They know if they need something for the cold, they can just stop by my office," Dawkins said. "They are always very appreciative, especially since what they get is something you won't get at a store. They are all handmade and that makes it even more special."

#### More than hats

And then there are the babies. Making caps for them was one of BeauKnits' first charitable efforts, but the baby offerings expanded after Hildreth found out some of the newborns needed more than hats.

"We started to hear from the birthing centers that some babies were going from birth to foster care with nothing but a diaper, a little hat and a borrowed blanket," Hildreth said. "So we started sending baby blankets and sweaters. So now a baby can go home with something of his own."

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#### To help knitters

Anyone interested in BeauKnits knitting projects or in donating supplies to help with the work, can contact Barbara Hildreth at 238-1465 or go to <http://www.beauknitsltd.com/>.

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