

I am very happy with the [Winter Coat Exchange](#) that took place yesterday.

What made it all worthwhile was being able to give coats away to folks from all socio-economic levels. Well-off folks took coats, driving home the concept of reusing; Women with children that had been referred to us by a local social agency came and took coats. One young man, dressed in very thin, practically sleeveless, clothes was looking at the coats and started to walk away. We told him he could take a coat and he said "for FREE?". We explained the coat exchange. He walked away with a warm coat on a rather cold day. He was one of many like this.

A veteran picked out a coat and profusely thanked us and stayed around to chat for awhile. An older man exchanged his thin hoodie for a warmer jacket.

Folks who donated appeared with arm loads of coats and sweaters with smiles on their faces. Some stayed and participated and others dropped off their donations as part of their errand-running for the day.

The smiles were priceless. The looks of content as folks walked away with warm clothing were "warming" in themselves.

Although we got lots of media to show up, I haven't seen anything appearing on the TV stations that covered us, nor in the papers today. I think there were stories more important than ours to put in today's news. But that's o.k. We got the coverage of the feature article in "IN Utah this week" magazine and hopefully our sound bytes will be on KCPW radio Monday or Tuesday. We were listed on multiple community calendars and the Deseret News announced it as an article in the Utah section on Thursday. The reporters/videographers/photographers that did show up shared personal stories with us and it was obvious that they enjoyed being with us rather than at the stampedes at the shopping malls - by virtue of the fact that they stuck around for a long time.

The left over coats are being taken to Crossroads Urban Center Thrift Store next week.

## **Start saving your coats - Next year this will be even bigger!**

Thanks to all who participated in any way with this - from donating and coming down to hang out, to printing out flyers and posting and publicizing to all your friends, co-workers, and clients. And a special thanks to the Green Party of Rhode Island for the inspiration to do this, which got this coverage of their event:

### **[The comfort of strangers](#)**

11:04 PM EST on Friday, November 24, 2006

By SCOTT MacKAY

Journal Staff Writer

**PROVIDENCE** - In the shadow of Providence Place mall - Rhode Island's symbol of glitzy upscale shopping - the 10th annual Buy Nothing Day Coat Exchange took place yesterday as hundreds of needy people received used winter coats dropped off by wealthier people who had more coats than they needed.

Under sunny skies, people flocked to the coat exchange on the south lawn of the State House as shoppers across the street thronged the mall on what has historically been the busiest Christmas shopping day of the year. On the State House steps, workers lifted a huge fir tree - the state Christmas tree - that Governor Carcieri will light on Friday.

Yesterday's coat exchange was the largest in the decade the event has run, said Greg Gerritt, co-founder and organizer. This year more than 60 community organizations, churches and other agencies, including the state police and the Rhode Island Resource Recovery Corporation, contributed coats.

"It is a simple notion," says Gerritt. "People who have extra coats bring coats and people who need coats take

coats. No questions are asked."

While winter seemed far away under yesterday's sun, all New Englanders know that snow and cold weather cannot be far away. So the coat exchange is always held on the Friday after Thanksgiving.

The coat exchange also delivers an environmental and recycling message, says Gerritt. "We are filling up the landfill, which is obviously not the right thing to do when people can reuse all these coats. This event works on a whole bunch of levels.... it shows the contradictions in a society in which so many people have so much stuff and in which so many don't have anything."

The coat racks, built for free by Youth Build Providence, were filled with the familiar brand names shoppers at the mall seek: Tommy Hilfiger, L.L. Bean, Woolrich, Polo Ralph Lauren, Eddie Bauer, Ann Taylor, Land's End, and Banana Republic.

There were, of course, no price tags and no dressing rooms. People who needed winter coats lined up, often with children in tow, and tried on the coats as best they could.

"I had coats I hadn't worn in 15 years ... they are wool and still stylish and warm," said Rob Schmidt of the city's Elmhurst neighborhood. Schmidt and his wife, Janice, dropped about 15 coats off yesterday.

They were snapped up.

Wendy Hernandez, who said she lives in the Silver Lake neighborhood, was picking up some children's coats. She works as a jewelry polisher, has four children and said she was thankful for the opportunity to get some warm coats for her children. "Everything costs so much in the stores," said Hernandez.

Gerritt and Phil Edmonds, who also has been working on the coat exchange for many years, have the exchange well-organized. As coats are dropped off at the curb, they are taken to be sorted by volunteers, then handed to runners who hang them on the long coat racks.

As soon as coats hit the racks, the scene at times resembles a Filene's Basement scrum. People without coats scramble to see whether the coats fit and round up their children for further fittings.

George Burke, a former high school principal who lives in East Providence, was one of many volunteers yesterday. "You don't usually see the hidden poor people, do you? Today is a day you do."

The coat exchange has expanded to sites in Pawtucket at the city's Visitor Center at 175 Main St. and in Newport at St. Paul's Church. When coats got low yesterday at the State House, Gerritt shifted some coats from Pawtucket to Providence.

Any coats left at the end of the exchange, which started at 10 a.m. and went until after 2 p.m., are taken to Camp Street Ministries, the International Institute and St. Joseph's Hospital, which has a program to help needy patients.

For Gerritt, a longtime Green Party activist who ran unsuccessfully for mayor of Providence in 2002, the coat exchange and "buy nothing" philosophy have a political edge. "It makes little sense to increase consumption, destroy the planet, or go to war when all it is upholding is an economy based on keeping wages as low as possible and inequality as high as possible. Surely there has to be a better way. Buy Nothing Day is about that."