

Java with a cause: New coffee shop will raise money for crisis hotline



By Stefanie Weiss

Pam Werntz (left) with CONTACT, the 24-hour crisis line, and Lori Heck of Heck's Frozen Meals are setting up a coffee shop at the deli, where revenue from sales will help offset budget cuts for the helpline.

By Travis Morse

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Organizers of a project to establish a new coffee shop in Freeport to benefit CONTACT of Northern Illinois say they want their initiative to inspire other for-profit and non-profit agencies to work together during the current economic downturn.

Starting later this month, the new coffee shop will open inside Heck's Frozen Meals & Deli, 1100 W. Galena Ave. in Freeport. Proceeds from the shop will help cover expenses for CONTACT, a volunteer agency that operates a 24-hour crisis hotline serving Stephenson, Jo Daviess, Carroll, Winnebago, Ogle and Boone counties.

CONTACT has struggled recently due to funding cuts and an increase in calls. Lori Heck, the owner of Heck's Frozen Meals, approached CONTACT about the crisis agency using available space at her eatery for a coffee shop. The two organizations then decided to collaborate on the project.

"Everybody has a soft spot for the different not-for-profits, and that's what happened here," said Pam Werntz, executive director of CONTACT. "Lori had a soft spot for CONTACT, and so now we figured this out and it's going to benefit both of us. So maybe some other for-profits that have a soft spot for a not-for-profit will do the same thing."

Lori Heck became familiar with CONTACT by catering some of the agency's events. When Heck's Frozen Meals hosted the Taste of CONTACT fundraiser in April, Lori suggested the coffee shop as a possibility. To Lori, the project seemed ideal for everyone involved.

"CONTACT was just one of those organizations that I fell in love with," Lori said. "I think it's going to help to get both of our names out there more. Because a lot of people still don't know about CONTACT. And a lot of

people don't know about my business on this end of town because everybody's moving to the other side of town."

The new shop will be known as CONTACT's Curbside Coffee, and will offer curbside service from 6:30 a.m. to 9:30 a.m. on weekdays once it opens. The curbside service in the morning will be run by CONTACT volunteers. After 9:30 a.m., the establishment will revert to a traditional coffee shop and will be manned by Lori's staff at Heck's Frozen Meals.

Grand Opening

Werntz said the shop's grand opening will be celebrated at the Burger Throwdown event planned for 5:30 p.m. on July 23 at Heck's Frozen Meals. The event is sponsored by Heck's and the Freeport Area Chamber of Commerce. At the event, organizers will have samples of the new shop's coffee available.

The first official opening day of the shop will be on July 24, Werntz said. The motto of the new shop is, "Isn't it amazing what two businesses can do when they put their hearts together!"

Heck's will allow CONTACT to use the space, and both entities will contribute a portion of the operating expenses for the new shop. Money left over will be donated to CONTACT.

If the new shop sells 15 cups of coffee a day, that would be enough money to more than pay for the rent and electric utilities at the local CONTACT office each month, Werntz said.

"That would be about \$5,400 a year that we don't have to worry about, which is huge when your budget is only \$47,000 annually," Werntz said. "We're not looking to make tons of money, but if we do, that will be great. Because the less money we need from the community and from the foundations and United Way, then the more the other agencies can get with the crisis that they're facing with the budget and the economy."

Food And Coffee

Heck's offers individual frozen meals, event catering, and a deli that features submarine sandwiches made with a unique soft bagel bread, Lori said. Those visiting the new shop can buy coffee, and also food available from Heck's menu. The coffee served at the shop will be "Victor Allen" brand coffee.

Werntz said CONTACT will have a booth at the Stephenson County Fair next week, and will offer coupons and a "Coffee Club" card where after 10 punches of the card you get a free cup of coffee at the shop.

For more information, contact Werntz at (815) 233-4357 or Lori Heck at (815) 232-9400 .