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Stanley Dye, a clerk-trainee at the upper West Side shop A Time for Children, and Marjorie Stern, who helped create the store. Shop donates its profits to the Children's Aid Society. Photo by Julia Xanthos

Toy store funnels its profits to kids

The sign is a heck of a hook.

It sits in the window of A Time for Children, a three-month-old toy store at 506 Amsterdam Ave. on the upper West Side, and it explains that all of the store's profits are given to the Children's Aid Society.

All, as in 100%. "A lot of people come in to ask if the sign is right," said Stanley Dye, 19, a store clerk and retail trainee. "Then they come back, and they bring their friends."

The 500-square-foot store, packed with stuffed animals, books, games and other goodies, is the brainchild of Marjorie Stern, who, with her husband, Michael Stern, runs the philanthropic Big Wood Foundation.

The couple, who made individual fortunes in the perfume and retail industries, founded Big Wood in 1987. They've been major supporters of the Children's Aid Society, a 150-year-old non-profit that provides a host of services, including counseling, academic scholarships, job training and medical and dental care, for children in the city's

20 years," Marjorie Stern said. "I like that they work with children right here in the city. If we invest in our children early, we can save lives and families."

Stern said she wanted to do something different for Children's Aid, "not just turn over a lump sum."

She decided to go with her forte.

"I know retail," said Stern, who once owned and operated three Pizazz clothing stores in the city. "I thought if we opened a store and taught the kids retail, it was something they could do without a college degree and still be able to support families."

It took a while to find and rehab the space, a former photo shop. Finding employees was easier — more than 40 young Children's Aid Society members signed up for the initial employee roster.

Fourteen of them completed training and joined the first group to operate the new store.

the books and create window displays to lure customers.

Customers are greeted when they come into the store, left to browse without a clerk looking over their shoulder and thanked for visiting as they leave — even if they don't buy anything.

"I want them to learn everything," Stern said. "They have to know what to do when UPS shows up with 10 boxes and there is no receipt."

The training seems to work — two of the 14 already have full-time retail jobs with the American Girl Place clothing store, said Michael Roberts, an assistant division director with the Children's Aid Society. Another, Maria Panora, 23, was promoted to training director at the store.

"We're hoping more stores will come forward to hire these young men and women as they complete the program," Roberts said during a party celebrating the store's three-month anniversary. "This is the next stage in youth development."

CITY BEAT

BY CLEM RICHARDSON

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