

Plastic bags put to good use in Dominican Republic

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KINGSTON — The Junior Women's Club is recycling plastic grocery bags in an unconventional way. Instead of bringing them to local grocery stores for recycling, the club will ship the bags to the Dominican Republic, where women will cut them into strips and crochet them into durable totes.

The recycled bags will be sent specifically to women living in impoverished communities where plastic bags are scarce. Sales from the totes will help the women provide a better life for themselves and their families.

"Our effort is twofold," club President Sue Phillips said. "One part is the recycling part of it and the other is empowering women in another country."

Phillips said it's a great way to recycle because each tote requires about 150 plastic bags. The totes take about 10 hours to make. They can be personalized in terms of color and style. The finished products cost between \$28 and \$45, depending on the size of the bag.

"The sale of one bag feeds a family of five in the Dominican Republic for a week, and the sale of three bags sends a child to school for a year," Phillips said. "It's really giving these women the opportunity to make their own money."

Earlier this month, the club teamed up with Curves of Kingston, where Phillips is an employee, to get the program off the ground. Curves manager Stephanie Ford agreed to set up donation boxes at the gym and is offering a free one-week pass to anyone who makes a donation.

Ford said she couldn't be happier to be involved in such a project.

"We have boxes right as you come in the door and a lot of our members have generously donated them," Ford said. "We love helping out the community — one of Curves' mottoes is strengthening women and empowering them, and this definitely allows us to do that."

Donation boxes also are set up at First Congregational Church in Kingston, which has contributed to the program's collection of more than 2,000 bags. The donated bags will be hand-delivered by Margarita Severinghaus, the director and founder of Dominican Republic Projects. She will leave for the Dominican Republic on July 28. Severinghaus makes multiple trips every year to deliver the plastic bags and return with the finished totes. Severinghaus, a Vermont resident, started the program in 1998.

Phillips said the program has been a great success so far and hopes to continue with it for many years to come.

"It's women empowering women — it can't get better than that," Phillips said. "I think that's why I have such a passion around it, it's good on so many levels."

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Photos



Jarrold Thompson/Staff photo Sue Phillips of Kingston talks about how recycled plastic shopping bags are being turned into tote bags by Dominican women. Phillips, who is working with the Kingston area Junior Women's Club, said the sale of one bag brings in enough money to feed a family of five for one week. Staff Photographer