

SERENDIPITY

'Options' to reach home base

A man walks into the store Tuesday afternoon and takes a blue armchair.

A few minutes later, another man walks in with an overstuffed leather chair.

"We have a lot of serendipity here," said Furnishing Options director Diane Brooks Ring.

"Last week, the store manager and I looked at one another and said, 'We're getting low on dishes.'" Within about an hour, "a Taylor Rental truck pulled up with 12 crates of dishes."

Not every day brings perfect balance to the Marlborough "furniture bank." Demand is up, and supplies are always in need of replenishing.

But there is a bit of karma at work at the 66 Mechanic St. store that provides household furnishings to those in need.

Perhaps it starts with the building itself.

Once owned by the Frye Boot Co., its most recent past was as the Lincoln Street Inn, "a rooming house with a lot of troubles," said Branch Yules, managing partner of Lilien Realty, which bought the building about five years ago.

"I felt they'd been working for a long time to turn the French Hill area around, but good luck doing it if you don't turn the biggest eyesore around."

There are now one-bedroom, studios and "yes,

still some rooms" above the commercial space that includes the area provided rent-free to Furnishing Options.

"Without him, this would not be possible," Ring said of Yules, who also volunteers for the organization that has assisted about 900 area residents since the store opened in December 2009.

"Our predominant service base is Marlborough, but we've seen people from all over," said Ring. "If they have a referral, I'm not going to turn them away."

Referrals come from service agencies, faith organizations, school counselors, "trusted sources," said Ring. Those with a referral can pick out things they need, based on family size and "what's in the store."

"The model we're following was suggested to us by Household Goods in Acton," a not-for-profit launched in 1990 that assists about 300 families a month.

As part of Employment Options, the Marlborough-based group that helps people recovering from mental illness, Furnishing Options also provides "a vocational training base" for those re-entering the work force.

The store offers home furnishings and housewares to those in need. These include a kitchen table and chairs, a settee or sofa, a bookcase, a picture for the wall, towels, an ironing board, pillowcases, a muffin

pan, coffee cups and clothes hangers.

"It's the stuff people have they take for granted.

"Most of the people that we serve are coming out of shelters, and they don't have anything, or they don't have very much," said Ring.

Furnishing Options has received assistance from many corners. Financial help has come from the Foundation for MetroWest and other businesses and organizations. There has been word-of-mouth support from real estate agents who know if someone may wish to donate furniture before a move. Members of Grace Baptist Church in Hudson lend a hand with labor. The Marlborough Junior Women's Club collected blankets and linens, and Northborough Junior Women's Club members

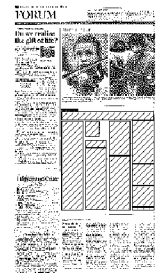
"are very eager to help us."

Still, there's always a need for more volunteers, especially for drivers to deliver larger items, and for donations of furniture and housewares. There are restrictions on what Furnishing Options can accept and provide. Information on what can be donated, and how to volunteer, is available at furnishingoptions.org or by calling 774-348-4922.

"We can turn the contents of this room around in a week," said Ring.

And as they do, there are the occasional reminders of karma at work.

Ring recalled the time a couple who'd been living in



a tent came in. Preparing for the move to housing, the woman focused on chairs and tables. The map was drawn to something on the wall.
“He found a picture of a unicorn. He said, ‘We used to collect unicorns when we had a home.’”
Sometimes something

small as a familiar image makes a house feel like home.
Helping people find such things “has been a life-altering experience for me,” said Ring.
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