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Mega-consignment sales

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By Lisa Vernon-Sparks

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Mary-Lyn Siderski fields a call about the consignment sale while logging items into the Web page. The clothes below have been labeled and made ready for the sale.

The Providence Journal / Bob Breidenbach

PROVIDENCE — Christine Wilford has held garage sales before in her backyard, with maybe 100 items, and if she was lucky she sold \$15 worth of stuff.

“You get a handful of people and you waste your entire day,” Wilford said. “No one wants to pay for what you are asking for. You could say a brand new shirt is \$2 and someone wants to offer you 50 cents.”

Wilford, 32, a mother of three, is hoping for a lot more success from a huge consignment event she’s co-organizing. Wilford and her friend Mary-Lyn Siderski are leasing a 2,800-square-foot space in Warwick, hoping to sell not only their gently used items — children’s things mainly — but some 4,000 more items coming, so far, from 70 people.

Wilford, of Providence, and Siderski, of West Warwick, suggest that consignors price items 30 percent of original cost. The event — RI Kid’s Consignment Sales — will take place April 22-24, at the Impossible Dream Playground in Warwick. It will feature children’s items, many high-end things and designer brand names of clothing for infants through teenage years; cribs, strollers, baby equipment, books, toys, videos and electronics.

The duo’s business, RI Kids Consignments LLC, is registered with the state, and they are required to charge sales tax on nonclothing items, Wilford said. The fee to be a consignor for their event is \$8.

Alison Murphy, of Newport, a mother of an 18-month-old, is also co-organizing an event called Be Green Kids Consignment Sale that will take place May 13-16 at the Fraternal Order of Police Hall in Middletown. Murphy is also hosting three consignment events in New York.

“This is like a real high-tech garage sale. This is good for people who don’t want to do Craigslist ... and it keeps all the money in the community,” said Murphy, who runs a marketing and promotions business from her home. “The way we intend to set up the hall, it will be like a retail store. Obviously, we don’t take items that are recalled.”

Murphy’s event will not accept maternity clothing or car seats. At least 60 percent of the items on sale will be infant and toddler clothing and used baby items, such as bouncy seats, jumpers, playpens, cribs, bumpers, high chairs.

She said most items will be priced between \$1 and \$20, but things like baby equipment may price higher. So far she has about 40 people registered to sell items.

The concept of a group consignment sale is new to Rhode Island, and Wilford’s event is one of two group sales happening for the first time in the Ocean State.

A growing trend for more than a decade, the group sale is popular in the South and West.

The people who sell items are consignors, and they pay a fee to register. They list their goods online in a database managed by the main host, someone like Wilford, who arranges the sales.

Unlike dropping off items at a brick-and-mortar operation, such as a thrift shop, which decides the value, the consignors decide the prices of their items. Wilford labels and places them on sale for a three-day period.

The organizer takes 40 percent of what sells; the consignor gets 60 percent. The group consignment sales are usually held twice a year in the spring and fall.

“It’s a way for parents to recycle their children’s items and allow them to make a return ... so they can be ready for next season. Kids are so expensive,” said Wilford, who attended a consignment sale event in Massachusetts before organizing one. “At the first one, I made \$500.”

Robyn Rutland who hosts Tot Swap, in Gaithersburg, Md., heads the National Association of Consignment Event Owners.

“It’s a great concept that simply makes sense for families and our environment,” Rutland said. “The sales out there range from small garage sales with only a few consignors to large expos center with thousands of families consigning.”

Kelli Nava, 39, co-owner of My Consignment Manager, based in Atlanta, Ga., leases software for organizers to keep a database of things being sold. The software creates labels and bar codes for the items.

Nava, a mother of three, started participating in consignment sales about 10 years ago, initially as a consignor and volunteer. Six years ago, Nava, an industrial engineer, developed this software application with her husband Alex, a computer engineer, after realizing it was grunt work to label sale items.

Her software, selling for \$200, has been used in more than 2,000 events in places including Hawaii, Maine, Georgia and Washington, Nava said.

“It’s the perfect industry. It’s not unheard of to have a sale [event] with 1,000 sellers,” Nava said. “If people like to [do the] garage sale [circuit], you only have so much time to drive around. [The consignment event] it’s one place where you are getting a large number of owners. All of their things are in one place and all the items are merchandized like a store.”

For their first event, Wilford and Siderski are spending just under \$4,000 to start their temporary retail outlet, including paying for the space rental, permit fees, business registration fee, software, Web design and domain, clothing racks, scanner and advertising. With \$17,000 worth of merchandize listed in the database, the women hope to make a profit.

“Most businesses look to turn a profit in about a year, after all the outlay,” Wilford said. “We are confident that we would have done that, if not by this sale, [then] by the next one. We won’t have the same outlay.”

At both Rhode Island consignment events, items on the last day of the sales will sell at 50 percent off what is tagged. Items that don’t sell are either returned or donated to a local charity at the consignors’ request.

Adele Meyer, president of the National Association of Resale and Thrift Stores, a trade organization with 1,100 plus members, said going to a consignment sale event is a matter of preference.

“It’s just depends on what the supplier and the customer are looking for,” she said. “Not everyone wants to wait six months to clean out their closets. Not everyone knows how to price. Not everyone wants to do the work.”

Where and when R.I. events

Two consignment sales this spring

RI Kids' Consignments

Children's clothing, goods

April 22–24: The Impossible Dream Playground, 575 Centerville Rd., Warwick., R.I.

April 22: Private sale for new mothers, pass required

April 23: General public,

9:30 a.m. to 8:00 p.m.

April 24: General public, half-price sale, 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Additional information: www.rikidsconsignment.com

Be Green Kids Consignments Inc.

Children's clothing, goods

May 14–16: FOP Hall, 464 Mitchells Lane, Middletown.

May 14: Private sale for volunteers

and new and expecting mothers,

pass required.

May 15: General sale, 9 a.m. to 6 p.m.

May 16: General sale, some items marked half-price, 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Additional information: www.BeGreenSale.com

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