

Shelter aids women seeking new life.

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ARTHUR — The used clothing landscape is heavily populated with stores of charitable intent and purpose. What makes Cinderella's Boutique different is where that charitable intent lies.

The new and used store that opened on Arthur's main street Saturday is the public face of a new women's shelter that will cater to women exiting the sex trade or who are victims of sex trafficking.

Beauty For Ashes Transformation Home, located in a rural area outside Arthur, is set to open later this spring, said Maggie Baratto, the driving force behind the project.



Cinderella

Tony Saxon, Mercury staff

Maggie Baratto sits in Cinderella's Boutique, a new and used woman's consignment store that opened Saturday in Arthur. It's in the face of a new shelter opening soon for women exiting the sex trade or show are victims of human trafficking.

"Sex trafficking is happening right here. It's happening in small towns and it's happening in Wellington County, Waterloo, Guelph: all across this region," Baratto said. "We've seen these people. We've met the women."

The new shelter, a 7,000 square-foot seven-bedroom home donated through a five-year lease for \$1 a year, will initially house up to six women 16 and older and a house mom.

Various health-care professionals from doctors to counsellors will be involved in helping the women get back on their feet during a three-month stay at the home, which is a Christian-based project.

Baratto said they've already received a call from police asking if they have room for women.

"I'm not worried about where we're going to get the women to stay at the home. I'm more worried that we're going to need a second home," Baratto said.

She hopes that eventually the shelter can be used as a template for others across the country.

"It will be a lot of crisis-related help. A lot of trauma stuff. A lot of these women have issues that go back years," Baratto said, adding that most importantly it will be a safe place that they can heal.

"We want to help them get set free from the things that are pulling them back and give them a clean break," Baratto said Saturday as the boutique prepared to open its doors to the public for the first time.

Cinderella's Boutique will help raise funds for the shelter but also be what Baratto called a "public face" for the shelter, which for the women's privacy and safety has to remain relatively secret.

The women at the shelter can also get clothing at the boutique and might volunteer at it.

Four years ago, Baratto had a successful career as a public health nurse. She said that's when God told her she had another purpose in life.

She came home and told her husband Eddie and the two started Father's Heart Healing Ministries in Arthur, a Christian venture that includes regular prayer meetings, a healing room, bible study, Christian café and various outreach programs for women, youth and seniors.

"It's really about taking the church into the street, where people need it," Baratto said.

She and her husband are also the Canadian Directors for the International Association of Healing Rooms, a "spiritual hospital" program started in the United States and now has 50 locations in Canada.

Vanessa Belanger, national administrator with the Father's Heart ministry and the healing rooms, said the project evolved very quickly.

"Once we got the ball rolling we started to see just how big the need was," Belanger said, adding that discussions with the local police also helped bring home the local need for such a place.

"Our eyes were really opened to what the need was. But we want to do this very carefully and make sure we do it right," Belanger said.

Baratto said it was meeting some of the women coming into the healing rooms and hearing their stories that motivated her to start the shelter.

"We had women with these issues coming into the healing rooms and I just had this strong sense that we're supposed to have a house for women and utilize our programs to reach these women and help them heal," she said.

She expects to have the legal work completed and the keys in her hand for May 1.

More information on the project can be found at **www.fhbm.org**