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FEATURED

## Early birds get top picks at annual rummage sale in Far Hills

Veterans of VNA benefit hunt down bargains

By AMY BARATTA, CONTRIBUTING WRITER Oct 12, 2012

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Shoppers couldn't miss the pink-clad helpers in the boutique tent on Friday, Oct. 5, the opening day of the Visiting Nurse rummage sale. The pink ladies were among the hundreds of local volunteers who help run the three-day fund-raising the Far Hills Fairgrounds.

Photos by Amy Baratta

FAR HILLS – The early bird gets the ... antique archery equipment?

That's what collector Ed Ficula hoped as he stood at the head of the line outside the sporting goods tent on Friday, Oct. 5, at the Visiting Nurse Association of Somerset Hills (VNA) fall rummage sale.

The event, held every fall and spring at the Far Hills Fairgrounds located on the corner of Route 202 and Peapack Road, is billed as the oldest and largest rummage sale in the state. The sale offers 75,000 square feet of shopping space with more than 25 departments of merchandise such as jewelry, electronics, clothing, kitchenware, toys and books.

All proceeds support the VNA's programs and enable the organization to care for those in Morris and Somerset counties who are uninsured or underinsured.

Ficula, a Chester resident who has been a regular at the sale for a decade, made sure he would be the first to enter the tent, getting up at 4 a.m. the first day of the sale and arriving at the fairgrounds at 4:45 a.m. – even before the volunteers who run the event.

He said he dozed in his car for an hour before the fairgrounds slowly came to life and staked his spot outside his tent of choice a good three and half hours before the three-day sale officially opened.

“We’re all here because we’re not all there,” joked Ficula, motioning to his head, as he looked down the long line of early arriving salegoers that had formed behind him.

Jim Covalinski also rose with the dawn to make sure he was in line early at the lighting and electronics tent.

The former Basking Ridge resident, who now lives in Hamburg, Pa., said he left home at 4:30 a.m. to beat the traffic and wound up at the head of the line at 6:30 a.m.

A seasoned sale veteran – Covalinski noted he has been coming to the VNA event for more than 30 years – he had a list of items he was looking for, including an amplifier to hook up to his computer, a compact disc player and a turntable.

Outside the furniture tent, Nancy Lee McLure, seated on a folding chair with a book in her hands, waited third in line in relative comfort with her husband, Frank Siwec.

The couple was on the hunt for various pieces of furniture for their home, and, in fact, purchased a dining room table a short while later.

Bringing portable seating was a new move for the Bernardsville woman, who said she has been coming to sale for five years.

"It's the first time I brought a chair," she said. "It's a great idea."

Several shoppers in other lines had the same idea, whiling away their wait with cups of coffee and reading materials such as books or newspapers.

Others used more high-tech means to beat their boredom, including a man who surfed the Internet on his laptop computer while waiting for the tents to open.

Smartphones, though, seemed to be the tool of choice both as a means of amusement and as a shopping aid. One woman confessed to updating her Facebook page with photos and her progress on line via her phone.

Many shoppers could be overheard on their phones discussing the pros and cons of purchasing various items and others browsed the Internet on their phones to look up specific sale items to gauge their value.

Still others photographed the merchandise and texted or emailed images to friends and relatives.

Jill Orosz of Gladstone, for example, stood outside the sporting goods tent and snapped away at a line of skis with her phone's camera. Her brother-in-law was in the market for a pair, she explained.

Slung over her shoulder was a small pair of roller skates - complete with hot pink wheels - picked out by her shopping companion, 3-year-old daughter Isabella.

Isabella's older brother had just gotten a pair of inline skates so she wanted her own set of wheels, Orosz said.

"For \$2, if she wears them once or twice, it's OK," she added.

Another mom, Megan Cudia of Basking Ridge, lugged two pint-sized purple bicycles - one with training wheels, one without - to the front of the tent to pay for them.

"I was on a mission for these," she said, noting that her 4-year-old daughter, Maddison, was in between bike sizes.

Even better? "She loves purple," she added.

Although Ficula, the Chester man on the prowl for antique archery equipment, did not find what he initially was looking for, he later was spotted browsing among odd sports paraphernalia that included a scuba tank.

Which seemed to fit the reason he said he was at the sale in the first place: "One is good, more is better and too many is just right."