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BETH KASSAB

Luxury brands down, not out. See why. B5



Even warmer 8 A.M. NOON 4 P.M. 8 P.M. 67°

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At her low point, Harvest Time was there

By Gary Taylor | STAFF WRITER

Coleen Bottomley found herself in some rough times in mid-2009. A single mother for nearly two decades, she had moved into an apartment in Sanford and was living alone.

"I had nothing," said Bottomley, 60. Through the years, she had made her son, Daniel, her priority. Ever frugal, she had made ends meet by stretching alimony, child support and money she received from working various jobs from time to time.

"I wanted him to grow up knowing that his mom was there for him all the time," she said. "I had put my life on hold."

Sometimes, things got tough, such as the time her car was repossessed

Please turn to **HARVEST, A16**



JACOB LANGSTON/ORLANDO SENTINEL
Coleen Bottomley now works in Sanford for Harvest Time International. It helped her in time of need.

FAMILY FUND | **Holiday Campaign**
Making a difference

HARVEST

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on her birthday. Still, it was worth it, she said. "My blessing is a son that did not turn out wrong."

Bottomley's son, now 20, moved out after graduating from high school, and she moved from an apartment in Altamonte Springs to her current residence. But she was out of work, and money that might have gone to buy food was needed to pay bills.

That's when she found Harvest Time International, one of the many nonprofit agencies supported by the Orlando Sentinel Family Fund Holiday Campaign.

erating officer.

In addition to helping individuals and families, Harvest Time distributes food to 250 nonprofit organizations throughout Central Florida.

Although Harvest Time provides some emergency food assistance at its Sanford facility, most clients are asked to pay a small amount for the food. Free food "is not a long-term solution" to the problems its clients face, Smolinsky said.

Bottomley found part-time employment with the organization. She was so thankful for the help she received, and so impressed with the work being done, that when her four-hour shift ended each day, she stayed to volunteer another four hours.

Now her work there has grown to full time. Her job: qualifying clients for food assistance.

Case-by-case basis

The organization generally serves people whose income is 200 percent of the poverty level or less. Qualifying is similar to that for getting food stamps, which the agency accepts.

But there are no firm rules. Each family's needs are addressed case by case, Smolinsky said.

It's rare that someone seeking help doesn't get it, Bottomley said.

Every time she interviews a client, there's a bit of a flashback to the days when she needed help, Bottomley said. She thinks that makes her more compassionate.

"I am presenting Harvest Time on their level," she said. "They touch my heart tremendously."

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JACOB LANGSTON/ORLANDO SENTINEL
Shoppers enter the Apple Store on Thursday at Florida Mall south of Orlando. Retail sales are up.

By Sandra Pedicini | STAFF WRITER

Fran Bantz feels comfortable spending a little more money on the holidays.

"It doesn't seem as gloomy as it did last year," said Bantz, an Orlando stay-at-home mom shopping at Altamonte Mall this week with a budget of about 10 percent more than in 2009. "It's still not as good as it could be, but it's a little better."

After two rough years, things are returning more to normal this holiday shopping season. But it's a new normal, where consumers still avoid deep debt and diligently seek sales.

Please turn to **SHOPPING, A9**



On a budget? OrlandoSentinel.com/frugalfor

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Thousands of children and elderly people throughout Florida need your help this season. Contribute to the Sentinel Family Fund Holiday Campaign. The campaign's goal is to provide toys and household supplies to children in need. Administrative costs are covered by the Family Fund and the Foundation, which provides 10 cents for every dollar donated. You also receive a coupon on your donation to a credit card. Call 1-800-518-3978. OrlandoSentinel.com Questions? Call 407-391-9681.