

BRICKELL

Fashionistas buy couture to benefit kids

■ The yearly Fashionably Conscious sale brings out couture bargain shoppers for a good cause.

BY ANNIE VAZQUEZ

Special to The Miami Herald

Legions of fashionistas came out to shop for a good cause last weekend at the third annual Fashionably Conscious event in Mary Brickell Village.

The fundraiser, which is known for selling women's couture clothing and accessories for as little as a \$1 up to \$500, had women anxiously standing in line hours before the doors opened.

"They definitely wanted first picks on the merchandise," said Maria Cabetas, 15, a student volunteer at the event.

Upper East Side resident Erica Saylor, 30, was one of the first to get inside to see more than 2,000 items on sale.

Rows and rows of racks brimming with Chanel suits, Dior dresses, Diane Von Furstenberg frocks and Chloe tops and skirts were neatly grouped into categories. There was also a bargain bin overflowing with apparel for \$3.

Saylor went directly for the shoe room. She was all smiles after nabbing four pairs of high-end designer footwear for more than 70 percent off.

"I got two Gucci shoes under \$100, a pair of Jimmy Choo [shoes] for \$40 and BCBGs for \$30," Saylor said.

"You can't beat these prices," she added while rushing toward the clothing racks.

The items on sale were donated from the closets of local socialites and fashion savvy women to raise money for the Barnyard Community Center in Coconut Grove.

The center is best known for offering children ages 5 to 15 in the West Grove neighborhood free after school and summer camp programs.

Miami Beach resident and local documentary filmmaker,



PHOTOS BY CHRIS CUTRO/FOR THE MIAMI HERALD

DIGGING FOR DIOR: Claudia Luca, 29, digs through the multiple racks of clothing hoping to find a good deal during the Fashionably Conscious couture clothing sale.

Alexandra Codina, 31, came up with Fashionably Conscious after searching for an innovative way to fundraise for the center.

"Most nonprofits have balls, but we didn't have a budget to throw one," said Codina, a board member of Coconut Grove Cares. "I started brainstorming and I came up with this because most people like to give away clothing instead of money."

Codina has been involved with the center since she started volunteering during high school to earn community service hours.

She said she approached a few close girlfriends with the idea to host the event.

"They loved it," Codina said. "A lot of them are into fashion and they liked the fact that we could hang out while doing some good for the community."

Friends such as Marcia Martinez, Cece Feinberg, Liza Walton, Claudia Miyar, Annette Lopez, Silvia Larrieu, Maile Rodriguez and Alexandra Gonzalez have helped the event grow.

"A lot of us are in event pro-



CHEAPER COUTURE: Cynthia Demos of Miami holds up a dress to see if it will fit during a charity couture clothing sale to benefit The Barnyard Center in Coconut Grove.

duction so we all knew how to free space, free fliers and liquor put together an event and get sponsors," said Martinez, vice

president of Zakarin Public Relations. "Plus, we all know a lot of women with great closets who were willing to donate."

Some of the socialites whose wardrobes went on sale were those of Darlene Perez, wife of developer Jorge Perez; Ana Cristina Defortuna whose husband owns Fortune International; and Raysa Fanjul whose family is in the sugar industry.

One of the most coveted items of the event was an Angel Sanchez red gown.

"It literally was gone in 30 seconds," said Walton. "We sold it for \$400."

Since Fashionably Conscious was launched three years ago from a Wynwood art gallery, the event has grown dramatically.

The first year, the event generated \$7,000. The next year it was moved to a larger retail space in Mary Brickell Village and raised \$20,000.

This year, a fashion show at the SET nightclub showcasing trendy items in the sale was added and \$29,582 was raised.

Sister Rosemary Bearss, the Barnyard's financial director, said the money in the past has helped the center hire a computer lab instructor and create a state-of-the-art playground.

This year the money will help the center pay for current programs after many organizations such as the United Way, the City of Miami and Miami-Dade County have had to cut their donations because of the recession.

"We need about \$40,000 to balance our budget," Bearss said.

Walton said she is thankful that they were able to collect so much to help out.

"I delivered the cash box to the staff at the Barnyard yesterday and they were ecstatic," said Walton. "Hopefully we will exceed the \$40,000 mark in 2010."

Future plans for the event include adding men's and children's clothing and accessories.