

## High School Seniors Score Big During Shopping Spree

By: Mattea Lusk

For the seventh year, Bargain Box Thrift Store, a mission of Naples United Church of Christ, hosted its Senior Shopping Spree for graduating high school seniors in the Grace Place for Children & Families AP Leadership Program. The event was held on Monday, May 20<sup>th</sup> and including seven lucky senior shoppers. Upon arriving, each student was handed an empty shopping bag and two hours to fill it with merchandise from the store.

Bargain Box started the event in 2012 as a way to give back directly to the community. Over its 44-year history Bargain Box has contributed over \$2 million from sales of its merchandise to dozens of community charities through Naples United Church of Christ missions.

The Grace Place AP Leadership program provides junior and senior level students at area high schools with ACT preparation help, college and scholarship application assistance and academic tutoring. Attending the shopping spree event were graduating seniors: Chnabelle Cyriaque, Ralph Volny, Jean Sagesse, Rebecca Paul, Christina Brice, Daniela Paz, and Valeria Neri.

Less than a half-hour into the shopping spree, Jean was already toting a bundle of clothing, shoes, a book and a board game in his arms. Ready for college life, Jean recently received a four-year scholarship to Florida Gulf Coast University (FGCU) where he plans to study physical therapy and hopes to one day have his own practice.

“I first became inspired to pursue physical therapy when my friend Larry had a gruesome leg injury while playing basketball during our junior year,” said Jean, whose quiet but friendly demeanor reflected the qualities of someone destined to heal. “I really enjoyed helping him recover and return to peak physical condition, and I want to help others in the same way.”

As Rebecca searched the housewares department for some dorm essentials, she stumbled upon an unexpected treasure: a drone equipped with a camera.

“I can’t wait to use this,” she beamed. Rebecca plans to study biology at FGCU and continue on to study orthodontics. “I had braces at 12 years old and it brought me so much confidence. I want to inspire that same confidence in others.”

Like many of the other shopping spree shoppers, Christina was hoping to find supplies for her dorm at Florida SouthWestern State College (FSW.) She chose an iridescent blue lamp and some organizational supplies from the housewares department at Bargain Box. Christina plans to pursue nursing at FSW and then explore the field of forensics.

"I have always been fascinated with the human body and its inner workings and I truly love using my outgoing nature to help others," said Christina.

Valeria and Daniela were an inseparable, smiling duo as they searched Bargain Box's ladies boutique where they found several casual and formal outfits. They also picked up two pairs of matching yellow swim goggles.

Valerie plans to study hospitality at FGCU. "I love the culinary aspect of the program," she said. Daniela, who received a four-year scholarship to FGCU, plans to study nursing. She found a petite side table and exclaimed, "I'm going to paint this white and put it right next to my bed!"

While the senior shopping spree event is a gift to local students in recognition of their academic achievements, store manager Sandy Goldstein says it's a big day for her volunteers too. "It's so much fun to watch the kids collect items for the next phase of their lives that many of our volunteers who aren't even on the schedule come to watch and help out."

"It's a great thrill to see each of the student's enthusiasm as they find items to use during college. We were fortunate to receive many large donations this year so we can continue to give back to the community and to these kids," said Goldstein.

#### **ABOUT THE BARGAIN BOX**

Located in the heart of downtown Naples, the Bargain Box thrift store is the longest operating community thrift store in Collier County. The store was established in 1975 by women leaders in the community including member of the Naples women's Club and Women's Fellowship at Naples United Church of Christ. Merchandise at the Bargain Box is obtained through 100 percent community donations, and revenue from sales fund donations into the community. In 2018, revenue from sales at Bargain Box is distributed to over 30 mission partners, including Grace Place. Over 100 volunteers, many of which are members of Naples United Church of Christ, assist in store operations. The Bargain Box is open year round and includes several departments such as furniture, housewares, jewelry, electronics, linens, books and men and women's clothing. The store also features an upscale women's boutique. The Bargain Box is located at 3906 Tamiami Trail East, [www.bargainboxnaples.com](http://www.bargainboxnaples.com) or (239) 262-3802.

