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Moscow's First Charity Shop Opens Near GUM

By Alex Labrom

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Lavka Radostei is, organizers say, Moscow's first Western-style charity shop, selling designer clothes and crafts to raise money for local charities.

Moscow's first charity shop, Lavka Radostei, or The Shop of Joy, is now up and running in a small street by GUM department store.

The shop is located in the back of the Star Dolls Gallery and is packed with designer clothes, from Calvin Klein to Jean Paul Gaultier. The store also has an unusual policy of customers being allowed to pay what they want for items.

The shop has a range of scarves, jewelry, ornaments, shelves filled with handmade crafts and information about how to help charitable organizations.

The charity shop is aimed at the well-off and opened at the end of July with a champagne reception and an expectation, wrote Vedomosti, that people would spend at least 1,000 rubles

($31) on the designer items on offer. The charity raised 116,000 rubles on its opening day.

Lavka Radostei works in coordination with the humanitarian partnership Vse Vmeste, which has established a network of over 30 charitable funds, shop manager Maria Timofeyeva said.

At the end of each week, the shop selects which charity will receive the money it has raised.

Charity shops are an everyday concept in the West, with one on every high street in the United Kingdom, but organizers say that after a shop called Spasibo opened in St. Petersburg two years ago, Lavka Radostei is only the second in Russia.

"Our main plan," said Timofeyeva, "is not to have just one shop but a network of shops."

This shop survives on donations, the work of volunteers and customers respecting the pricing system. However, the pay-as-much-as-you-want idea has already had its hiccups.

Staff had to persuade customers who offered 100 rubles for an item that they should donate more.

"At the moment the system works," said Timofeyeva. "But there is the danger that people will find out and take advantage of it."

Less than two weeks after opening, the shop introduced a fee of 250 rubles for entrance to the gallery and the shop.

One commentator on the shop's Facebook page noted, "That didn't last long," when the entry price was announced.

Ticket holders can visit the shop as many times as they want once they have bought an entry ticket.

The shop, which is open daily except Mondays, organizes a theme day every Thursday. Recent ones include Ethnic Day, when customers could browse through a range of Oriental clothing and exotic hats, Porcelain Day and in the future, Wedding Day, with appropriate dresses on show.

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