

Group's resolve shines through in rebounding from Restore fire



Michael Jiggins

bly too smoke damaged.

Depending on what they find, Caruso says they could be operating from a location behind the converted airplane hangar by the end of next week.

How's that for not letting an incredible setback hold you down?

"The sooner we can get back up and operating again, the better off we are," reasoned Caruso.

The ReStore sold salvaged home-building supplies of every description and as its success grew it became a critical piece in the local Habitat chapter's fundraising puzzle.

She allowed herself less than 24 hours to mourn over last Thursday night's fire, which laid waste to the operation's hardware, but not its heart.

"I was very shaken. I came to the fire, I saw it and it was one of the most devastating things I've ever seen," recalled Caruso.

By the next afternoon, the sadness Caruso and others felt hadn't disappeared, of course, but it was pushed to the back of their minds as they set about ensuring last Saturday's plant sale went ahead.

It did – and it was a resounding



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success.

"One of the things about Habitat for Humanity is we don't allow setbacks to get us down," stressed Caruso.

She's actually already found the

silver lining in this smoky cloud.

"I think coming out of this we're going to get more volunteers, donors, customers – everything is going to be good," she explained.

"It's just we have to jump a cou-

ple of hurdles to get there."

Arson has been raised as a possible cause of the blaze, although investigators from the Ontario Fire Marshal's Office and OPP have yet to confirm that suspicion.

For her part, Caruso sounds like she at least wants to believe the best in this community.

"I have a very hard time thinking that anybody could set a fire anywhere," she explained. "But at a charity, it seems quite beyond belief."

If it was set purposely, Caruso was quick to agree with me that rebuilding would take on even more importance.

Reopening would send a resounding message that the worst of society, those who seek to tear down the efforts of others, is no match for its better parts.

Regardless of how long it takes to restore the ReStore, Habitat officials have already vowed those efforts won't interfere with this year's home-build in Newboro.

Caruso expects to put out the call for volunteers by the end of the month.

If you can't offer some elbow grease, Habitat will thankfully take a financial donation or some word-of-mouth advertising to let folks know "it's not down and out."

She said customers have already been asking when they can come search for that impossible-to-find item to complete their home renovation.

When I asked Caruso to look ahead 12 months, she didn't pause for a moment before displaying that hallmark Habitat optimism.

"You won't recognize it a year from now, that I guarantee. We have huge plans and this won't put us back very far."

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