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HAPPY TO HELP: "I really like the idea of trying to make the best of the situation," Buffalo Exchange Associate Manager Evan Sinclair says.

MINDY SCHAUER, THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

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Donating your furs

If it warms your heart to imagine foxes, raccoons or other critters curled in the sleeve of your sable, drop off unwanted fur items at the Buffalo Exchange stores in Costa Mesa (in The Lab, 2930 Bristol St.) or downtown Fullerton (215 N. Harbor Blvd.).

Those who wish to claim a tax deduction for their donations must mail furs directly to the Humane Society of the United States, 2100 L Street NW, Washington, D.C. 20037.

For more information on the Humane Society's Coats for Cubs program, see www.coatsforcubs.org; on Buffalo Exchange, see www.buffaloexchange.org; and on the fur trade association, see www.iff.com.

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Creature comforts become a cause

Local stores collect unwanted furs destined to provide sick and injured animals some relief.

By TERI SFORZA
The Orange County Register

Within the bin was a coral-colored fur stole with a bejeweled, built-in brooch. A mauve fur vest. A white-and-brown fur purse.

Associate Manager Evan Sinclair dug through the discarded furs at the Buffalo Exchange store in Costa Mesa on Sunday, imagining their new lives. This rabbit purse, he said, will be turned inside out, and a baby opossum or some such will snuggle inside.

"I really like the idea of trying to make the best of the situation, rather than protesting the fur industry," said Sinclair.

Orange County, do you have fur shame? Are those rabbit gloves you bought in 1973 still sitting in a drawer because you have no blooming idea what else to do with them?

Did well-meaning Aunt Mabel bequeath unto you a mink so mottled or mangy that you don't even want to touch it?

The Humane Society of the United States has teamed up with Buffalo Exchange, the hipster resale store with branches in 12 states, to press used, old, ugly or otherwise unwanted furs into action.

From now through March 20 (International Earth Day), Buffalo Exchange's nearly three dozen stores (including branches in Costa Mesa and Fullerton) will act as collection spots for the Humane Society's "Coats for Cubs" program.

The furs will be sent to licensed wildlife rescue groups in the U.S. and Canada, where they'll be cut up and used as bedding or toys for orphaned and injured animals until they're returned to the wild.

The Humane Society has been accepting discarded furs for this purpose for more than a decade, but this is the first year it has partnered with Buffalo Exchange. It's reaching a younger, cooler crowd – and fur donations are up exponentially.

In 2005 – before Buffalo Exchange – there were 1,560 fur donations, said Andrea Cimino, campaign coordinator for the humane society.

So far in 2006, about 3,600 items have been donated – and there are still several weeks to go.

"It's just easier for people to drop off big items in their neighborhood, rather than shipping them to our headquarters," Cimino said.

The nature of Buffalo Exchange also makes the fur fly.

It's a hyper-trendy resale place (with sales of \$40 million a year) that turns its nose up at stuffy items that would be prizes at, say, Goodwill.

On Sunday, a bag full of very well-kept, but a tad uncool, Ann Taylor-type-outfits was summarily rejected.

Had anything been of interest, the owner would have been offered 35 percent of the item's sale price in cash, or 50 percent of that value in store merchandise.

As folks bring in what they hope is cool enough to make the cut, Buffalo Exchange sees a good bit of fur, Sinclair said.

He only buys fur items that are truly outrageous and over-the-top; to all the rest, he suggests Coats for Cubs. Fliers advertising the program are posted all over the store.

Collection officially began Friday. The Fullerton store, which has only been open a couple of months, already has a rabbit coat in its bin, associate manager Jason Harris said.

Fur remains popular.

Sales increased in 2005 for the seventh consecutive year, according to the International Fur Trade Federation, totaling \$12.8 billion.

That's a 9 percent increase over the previous year.

"Fur is not a 'here-today-gone-tomorrow' fashion – it is an integral part of a winter wardrobe," chairman Andreas Lenhart said in a press release on the federation's Web site.

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