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Goodwill discovers treasure in donation

By - *The Washington Times* - Thursday, June 26, 2008

EASTON, Md. (AP) | A sharp-eyed Goodwill employee recently discovered and set aside a valuable French Impressionist painting dropped off amid used coffee makers and clock radios.

Goodwill later sold the Parisian street scene at auction for \$40,600.

The picture - called "Marche aux fleurs" or "Flower Market" by Edouard Leon Cortes - was left in March at the Goodwill in Easton, on Maryland's Eastern Shore.

"It could have very easily ended up put in a pile, marked for \$20," said Ursula Villar, marketing and development director for Goodwill Industries of Chesapeake Inc.

Employees told the Baltimore Sun that treasure finds at Goodwill are common, but usually they surface after a savvy shopper takes them home. This time Goodwill will keep the profit for its charity work.

The donor is out of luck. Even if someone came forward and could prove they donated the picture, Goodwill donations are considered legal and final transactions.

"We just lucked upon an opportunity to increase our ability to give back," store manager [Terri Tonelli](#) said.

Mrs. Tonelli says she returned from a spring vacation to store employees asking her to look at a donated painting they suspected was valuable. She agreed the picture of a rainy Paris street appeared genuine, not a print, and looked up the artist's name on Google.

Mrs. Tonelli discovered that Cortes was a notable French Impressionist whose work had sold at auction for prices near \$60,000. The painting likely was done in the early 20th century,

when Cortes started painting Paris street scenes for which he's known.

"The hair on the back of my neck was standing up by then," Mrs. Tonelli said.

Mrs. Tonelli shipped the painting to a larger Goodwill office in Baltimore, which had it examined by local art experts. When artists determined the painting may be genuine, Goodwill managers then shipped it to Sotheby's auction house in New York, where the painting was cleaned and appraised.

After Sotheby's determined the painting was authentic, and had not been reported stolen, the "Flower Market" picture was auctioned recently for \$40,600. Sotheby's does not identify winning bidders.

A gallery owner in New York who bid on the painting but lost the auction told the Sun that Cortes pieces are growing in value.

"He was always appreciated as an artist, but now people are beginning to see the importance he had," said Howard Rehs, co-owner of Rehs Galleries Inc., which has 10 Cortes paintings.