

The New Mexican-La fashionaria

Snag some deals for a good cause.

Elite and Repeat sitting on a fence. Elite fell off. Who was left? Elite and Repeat sitting on a fence. Elite fell off. Who was left? Elite and ... OK, I'll stop now.

But I know when you find out what the Elite Repeat is; you'll forgive me for forcing the phrase into your head in such an annoying yet sing-song manner. Elite Repeat is a fundraiser garage sale of sorts for the National Dance Institute of New Mexico.

But it's not like most garage sales.

Elite Repeat is not the offal of the poor. It's the offal (and some of the awful) of the rich. It's the offal of women who travel, women who volunteer to keep busy, and women who actually buy new wardrobes every year.

Instead of knitted toilet-paper covers with plastic faces, used lipsticks and old cookbooks, Elite Repeat features gently worn designer clothes, jewelry and handbags.

And the prices are stupid cheap.

During my pre-sale perusal of the developing collection at the Dance Barns last week, I saw a pair of black leather riding boots for \$4; a pair of DNKY round-toed pumps for \$1; and a black leather miniskirt for \$4.

The boots were size 7 or 8. The pumps were size 7. Get there early or you'll have to arm-wrestle me for them.

Even Elite Repeat's roots are ritzy. It was patterned after the Posh Sale held annually in New York City to raise money for an organization called The Lighthouse for the Blind.

Jane Rote, who runs Elite Repeat, used to work for Lighthouse for the Blind, helping blind dancers exit stage left after performances.

She worked at the Posh sale before coming to Santa Fe and learned the art of separating the designer wheat from the chaff from Benay Venuta, a retired vaudeville actress who ran the sale with an iron fist.

"She was really mean," Rote said. "She would get mad if you let something out with dirt or something under the arms or in the crotch. She hated that."

But she taught Rote how to spot the good pieces, toss the trashy pieces and price things to sell.

Rote manages her sale with iron fist, too, but it's encased in a velvet glove.

When volunteers offer to help, she snaps "No, you'll change everything!" But more often, you hear her laughing or telling one of the volunteers something would look cute on her or murmuring admiration for a particularly good garment.

Elite Repeat isn't all cream. You'll have to breathe musty mothball smells while you wade through nasty patterns and the stray White Stag item that has slipped in among the Armani, Nicole Miller, Ann Taylor and Lauren.

You'll have to paw through a dozen matronly dresses and shoulder-padded power suits to find the one red, scoop-necked Sonya Rykiel T-shirt from Paris (\$21).

You'll have to see the humor in the perfectly preserved Gunne Sax dress, circa 1984, to get to the funky yellow and brown original Pucci print blouse (\$51).

And you'll have to burrow through mountains of gaudy faux pearls and CZ rings to get to the real Jade pendants and ropes of sterling-silver filigree beads.

But shooting fish in a barrel is no fun, anyway- and besides, this is for a good cause.

The money raised at the sale (about \$8,000 per year for the past three years) goes directly into NDI's general operating funds.

The organization- which is a 501 c (3), meaning it has federal non-profit status- brings dance to New Mexico children in a myriad of ways, many of which cost little or nothing. Use this fact to justify spending money you don't have.

Elite Repeat will be held from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Sept. 24 at the Dance Barns, 1140 Alto St. On Sunday, Sept 25, whatever is leftover will be sold from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. – for 75 off.

The dregs will be donated to the Red Cross to help dress Hurricane Katrina victims.

If you have upscale hand-me-downs you'd like to donate to Elite Repeat, contact Amy at 983-7646 ext. 101.