

NEW YORK POST

By CHRISTOPHER MOORE

CASH is not necessarily king anymore. Consider, for example, the experience of Elisa Chen. Laid off from her finance job, Chen recently launched a family-friendly yoga and pilates studio, Body and Mind Builders, in TriBeCa. While getting the business off the ground, she began to think of ways to cut costs.

"Things were slower than I anticipated and I was running low on capital," she says.

The answer: bartering, which became her preferred method for purchasing everything from logo development to photographs for her Web site. She even bartered for squash lessons for her two children.

"One extra person in class is not costing me anyway," says Chen. "I can't say enough good things about the experience."

In an era of unemployment and job insecurity, a growing number of New Yorkers like Chen are trading on their talents. The evidence can be seen in the growth of forums for exchange, from Web sites to a newly formed Meetup group, as well as Craigslist's ballooning bartering board. A recent visit to the latter revealed a life coach looking for someone to help write Web copy, a masseuse looking to trade rubdowns for electrical work, and an attorney offering to craft a will for someone who'd paint his kitchen.

Even the city itself is getting into the act. Just this month the Bloomberg administration launched a time-banking initiative, as part of a larger effort to encourage volunteerism.

"The economic downturn increases people's awareness of bartering," says Tom Judge, the

Brooklyn photographer who took the shots of Chen's studio — and will in turn take classes there with his wife. When times get tough, he notes, "Everyone still has his or her trade."

At the Visiting Nurse Service of New York's Community Connections TimeBank, membership has grown from 274 at the end of 2007 to 1,292 members today.

"People are really eager to sign up," says director Mashi Blech, who said many members are un- or under-employed.

Under the TimeBank system — which VNSNY has duplicated in Upper Manhattan and Sunset Park — members trade services

on an hour-for-an-hour basis, making time deposits and withdrawals rather than swapping services directly. Each person's time is valued in the same way, whether they're offering tutoring or home companionship.

On top of being a creative way to trade services, time banks are great community builders, says Blech, whose group holds regular potluck gatherings.

"The more our members meet, the more they trust," Blech says. "And the more they trust, the more they trade."

Among those trading is Elizabeth Berger, 23, who learned of the time bank through her job with AmeriCorps. A member

since last fall, she leads an English conversation group in Sunset Park to help others improve their language skills. In return, she's received alterations and Mandarin lessons. She appreciates not only the services she trades for, but the chance to interact with a group that's multi-ethnic and cross-generational.

"It's not a group I would have met with my job," she says.

Angela Badolato of Bay Ridge joined last year, offering slots in her belly dancing classes for much-needed computer help.

"I have a lot of things on my computer that are a little bit

See **BARTER** on Page 44

SWAP MEET: Yoga and pilates studio owner Elisa Chen has traded classes for photographs from Tom Judge (left) and squash lessons from Mansoor Razzaq.



Michael Sotronski

TRADE BALANCE

City's slowdown brings bump in bartering



Lorenzo Giamello

SHAKE AND TAKE: Angela Badolato of Brooklyn has traded belly dancing lessons for computer help.

Exchange rate

BARTER from Page 43

beyond me," she says. "QuickBooks, especially."

If part of bartering's appeal is to get cash-free services, another is to take part in a community-based form of commerce in a dog-eat-dog city, says Badolato. She likes the idea of experiencing life "from a more flowing place," she says.

Caroline Woolard, a Brooklyn artist and co-founder of the online network OurGoods.org, sees the rise in bartering as part of "a general cultural shift toward resource-sharing," and cites Zipcar as an example.

The idea behind OurGoods — which is currently running in a prototype phase, pending a fall launch — is to provide for the sharing of services to support independent projects throughout the city.

"People can invest in each other's ideas and help each other with their work," Woolard explains.

This past winter, the site's founders ran Trade School, a Lower East Side-based bartering bonanza where participants hosted instructional sessions on topics ranging from playwriting to butter making, and students paid in trade.

"The idea is to introduce people to the concept of bartering," says Woolard, who's among those working to bring the school back next fall for another go-round. She describes bartering as a common-sense response to bad economic times, but also as something more meaningful — a different model of behavior.

"It gives space to develop relationships with people," Woolard says.

Or as Badolato, the belly dancing teacher, puts it: "It's not about what you can get. It's giving as well."