

**R.J. Gallagher**  
**Philantopia**

June 15, 2013

## **The Thrift Shop: always in style**



---

“Fashions fade. Style is eternal.” — Yves Saint Laurent

How often does a handbag help send a young student from Roaring Fork High School to a higher education at the University of Richmond? How often does a one-piece ski suit from the '80s provide a stage to perform at Aspen Elementary School? How often do yesterday's fashions make a difference in the lives of individuals and organizations in need? The answer to all three questions: It happens every day at the Thrift Shop of Aspen.

Talk about giving the term “paying it forward” a whole new meaning. The Thrift Shop of Aspen is a true community gem of an organization and shopping experience. Its mission is simple: to sell

donated goods at affordable prices, to engage in community-building activities, to make grants to other nonprofit organizations in the Roaring Fork Valley and to provide scholarships to Roaring Fork Valley high school graduates.

Its mission continues to be accomplished, and we all will be better off because it is for at least another 64 years.

Every month, the volunteers of the Thrift Shop of Aspen meet in order to continue to achieve the goals set forth in their guiding principles. Their overall mission is funded by community members who support their efforts by donating and purchasing gently used clothing and household items. It's that circle of giving that makes the program work. The community actually is donating the goods. The dedicated and committed volunteers, more than 140 strong, and the board of the Thrift Shop of Aspen, repackage the donations and sell them at affordable prices back to the community and manage the vision and perform within the guidelines of their nonprofit charter. It's a recycling of give back, to and from, the community. Fashion forward, indeed.

---

In May and June, the Thrift Shop made scholarship grants to six deserving students from Aspen, Basalt and Roaring Fork high schools. It also made a positive financial impact for 25 valleywide nonprofit organizations, ranging from the Aspen Science Center to Youth Zone, by providing monetary donations to help cover the escalating costs of keeping such valuable nonprofit organizations alive and well.

When the Thrift Shop of Aspen opened its doors way back in 1949, its original objective was to help the old "citizens hospital," which was in a Victorian home at the base of Red Mountain. The hospital needed to hire additional nurses, as business was booming. The Thrift Shop helped generate the money to help pay the salaries of the new nurses. Its mission was now alive by helping the community stay well.

The next goal was helping fund the Red Brick School, which now houses the Red Brick Center for the Arts. It initially was instrumental in starting the first kindergarten and the first hot-lunch programs for the school, eventually becoming instrumental in the growth of the school.

For years, the Thrift Shop primarily supported the hospital and the Red Brick School, but in the mid-'50s, it branched out and provided support for the Aspen Ski Club by providing funding and donating skis. It now supports, on an annual basis, dozens of valleywide nonprofits and very deserving valley students by providing college scholarships for their continued higher education. If you were to ask the scholarship committee of the Thrift Shop of Aspen how daunting a task it is to select the final scholarship awards from the dozens of highly qualified and worthy applicants, the response would be that it is nearly an impossible task. A tribute statement, I say, to our valleywide education system and the students the system creates.

Since 1983, the Thrift Shop of Aspen has been between the Aspen Fire Station and Peach's Cafe on East Hopkins Avenue. The store's hours are 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Monday through Saturday and when the store reopens between 4 and 7 p.m. Tuesdays.

The Thrift Shop of Aspen is a pure retail nonprofit. It is organized. It is dedicated. It is needed. It

even has an Albert Schweitzer quote that it posts in its handbook for all of its volunteers: “I don’t know what your destiny will be, but one thing I do know: The only ones among you who will be really happy are those who have sought and found out how to serve.” Go, Albert.

Find the time to stop in and share your wares and clothing or provide a financial contribution as a community donation. You also can find a new fashion look and make a difference in your own backyard at the same time. Because at the Thrift Shop of Aspen, giving back and feeling good about it never goes out of style.

“Philantopia” is a monthly column of The Aspen Times focusing on philanthropy and community involvement. R.J. Gallagher Jr. is a three-decade resident of the Roaring Fork Valley. He has served on numerous nonprofit boards, including those of the Aspen Community Foundation and Komen Aspen. His firm, Forte International, is a supporter of local philanthropy that makes a difference on a global level. His email address is [rjg@forteinternational.net](mailto:rjg@forteinternational.net).

©2005 - 2013 Swift Communications, Inc.