

# Thrift Shop of Aspen will celebrate its 65th birthday this year

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A man might have started it, but it's been an army of women volunteers that have made The Thrift Shop of Aspen the local icon it is today.

When former Aspen resident Bob Marsh first announced the opening of "The Thrift Shop" in November 1949, it was to benefit the Pitkin County Hospital. In that first year, the shop donated \$1,200 in cash as well as operating-room equipment, sterilizers, humidifiers, a refrigerator, stomach pump, flooring, curtains, dishes and more to the hospital.



Lynda MacCarthy, treasurer, speaks at a Thrift Shop of Aspen meeting on Monday, held at the Elk's Club. The shop opened in 1949 and since then has given \$6.5 million to non-profits and local high school scholarships in the Roaring Fork Valley.

Marsh, 92, now lives in a retirement community in Long Island, New York, but still holds many memories of his time involved with The Thrift Shop.

"I had spent some time in Nantucket, and they had a wonderful thrift shop helping their hospital," Marsh said. "I figured if they could do it, why not Aspen? Our hospital was in terrible trouble and needed assistance. We helped the hospital quite a bit and the Thrift Shop has been going strong since. Those women that volunteer there should be proud of what they accomplish. They dedicate so much of

their time."

This year marks the 65th anniversary of when The Thrift Shop of Aspen first opened. In that time, local giving and donating has continued to grow, with an estimated \$6.5 million given back to nonprofits and high school scholarships in the Roaring Fork Valley. In 2014, the Thrift Shop is planning on awarding around \$500,000 in grants and scholarships.

The Thrift Shop hears plenty of success stories involving the financial help they provide.

Two recent individual recipients used their scholarship awards to jump-start their budding careers in remarkable fashion.

Kevin Coulombe graduated from Aspen High School in 2006 and accepted a \$10,000 scholarship from the Thrift Shop. He used that money to attend Cal-Poly in San Luis Obispo, California.

"It was through the generosity of the Thrift Shop that I was able to attend my dream school, which set the rest of my life down a path of success," Coulombe said. "I'm now the youngest person in the world certified as shift lead for the ALICE detector, part of a large hadron collector. This honor is a direct result of my senior project at Cal-Poly, a school I was only able to attend because of the Thrift Shop's kindness."

Chelsea Tiernan graduated from Roaring Fork High School in 2003 and was the recipient of an \$8,000 scholarship from the Thrift Shop. Tiernan used that money to get into Western State College in Gunnison and has flourished since then.

“After graduating from Western State in 2007 as a double major in biology and psychology, I enrolled in graduate school at Michigan State University,” Tiernan said. “At MSU, I studied environmental risk factors for Parkinson’s disease. In 2013, I received my Ph.D. in neuroscience. I’m currently working as a post-doctoral research fellow for the department of translational science and molecular medicine in the College of Human Medicine at Michigan State. It was an honor to be a scholarship recipient from The Thrift Shop of Aspen.”

Katherine Sand is a member-at-large on the Thrift Shop board of directors and is chairwoman of the grants committee. She said there isn’t a piece of Aspen’s infrastructure that hasn’t been touched by the Thrift Shop.

“The donations from the Thrift Shop have been felt all over Aspen,” Sand said. “We’ve seen money go toward our schools, the library, city parks and of course the hospital. Whether it was helping with a fundraiser, donating medical equipment or funding a school carnival, the Thrift Shop has touched Aspen in ways like no other local institution.”

Like most thrift shops, the Aspen store relies on donated items to sell back to the public.

“We’re the original recyclers,” said Thrift Shop secretary Ellen Walbert.

The money raised goes toward the grants and scholarships the Thrift Shop awards yearly. None of the volunteers or board members are paid for their time working with the shop.

The shop also has a reputation that extends beyond the Roaring Fork Valley. Shop volunteers meet people from all over the country that have heard about the shop long before they visited Aspen.

“We’re a tourist attraction,” Walbert said. “How many thrift shops can say that?”

Lynda MacCarthy has been the Thrift Shop treasurer for 21 years and said the vision and goals of the shop are unwavering.

“Our vision is to continue being what we are,” she said. “We’re all women and we’re all volunteers that help and serve our community. We’re really invested to make a difference within the valley and we’ll continue to offer the same service that’s been here since 1949. In fact, our prices are nearly the same as they were 65 years ago. You can still buy a shirt for 25 cents.”

Carolyn Moore started volunteering at the shop in 1972 with her mother-in-law, Alberta Moore. She’s been a board member for 30-plus years, serving as president and the head of volunteers.

Moore said the camaraderie is one of the main perks of being a volunteer.

“These women are a second family to me,” she said. “I’ve been volunteering here every other Thursday for more than 40 years. Now that’s commitment. What I’m hoping is the spirit of the shop continues indefinitely. Let’s keep the donations coming and hopefully see some younger women join us to volunteer.”

The Thrift Shop of Aspen will hold its 65th birthday party in September. For more information on the shop, visit [AspenThriftShop.org](http://AspenThriftShop.org).

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