

# A Thrift Shop with Dior and Gucci as Neighbors

September 29, 2018



You'll rarely see such an unusual setting for a thrift store. In downtown Aspen, Colorado, a mountain town that's been overtaken by wealthy commerce, you'll find the bustling Aspen Thrift Store literally across the

street from Dior and Gucci stores.

For seven decades, volunteers at the Aspen Thrift Shop have turned donated clothing, shoes and housewares into millions of dollars of support for area nonprofits. Last year \$609,904 was distributed to charities, schools, college scholarships and youth activities on the strength of this three-level shop.



A true community thrift store is like leader Alice Paul's definition of activism:



Each of us picks up a little stone and eventually you build a great mosaic.

Volunteers commit to just two days a month to work this miracle. And boy, do they work.

Thrift store treasurer Margie Throm says volunteers sort through at least 65 bags of donated items each day. The shop finally had to install a gate at its rear loading dock a year ago because so many bags and boxes showed up after hours. Even still, most mornings some of the shop's 110 volunteers find bags that have been tossed over the gate.

"We're so hysterical to stay ahead" of the incoming goods, Throm said. "People come up with flatbed trucks," often with the contents of vacation rental houses at the end of summer and ski seasons.

"People buy too much, from the ladies who are shopaholics to the clothes that are never worn and the person who donates 12 umbrellas," said Throm. "We get seven identical pairs of pants in various colors. It's consumerism gone wild."

There is so much supply that the shop bought a Haulmark Trailer, which it fills with clothes and baby items to take every two months to a thrift store in Canyon City, near the county jail, which helps out young families.



Throm grew up at the shop—her mother was its first treasurer. She values her time sorting and organizing in the shop as she works with women who are her lifelong friends, including Emma Danciger, a 23-year- volunteer and Kathleen Kauss, sorting for 15 years. But like many community thrift shops, its volunteer corps is aging out. Younger women, with children and outside jobs, have less time to give.

Regardless, the donate and resale engine moves on. The shop is so productive it was able to build its own store, with elevator, in prime

downtown retail space, eight years ago.

It's open just five hours a day, so it's typically busy. Tourists and locals shop for its high-end labels and its ready supply of parkas, down vests, ski pants, boots and other cold-weather wear.

The day we visited, there was a box of free stuffed animals at the door, along with a very new Wurlitzer piano keyboard for \$30, tags-on FootJoy brown saddle golf cleats for \$25, an aqua Tahari dress for \$35, a seemingly unused blond oak baby changing table, with pads, for \$50, and a Medela breast pump and case for \$30 (normally \$200 plus). A kids' lemonade stand, run by the shop, was outside.



Pricey brands like a Guy Laroche black wool pullover sweater, from Paris, carried a bargain \$14 price and a Nina McLemore seersucker checked shirt was \$18. A terrific yellow Lands End hooded parka was just \$10.

Boxes of brand new board games (clearly bought for vacation use and then donated upon departing) were \$2. The latest hardback books were \$1.

The shop wrote a book of its own, *Aspen Cooks: Recipes from the Thrift Shop in Aspen*, which is \$5 and worth it for its collection of healthy fare.

One local, Nina Gabianelli, vice-president of education for the Aspen Historical Society, explained how the disconnect between a thrift store and costly neighbors like Prada, Montcler and Helly Hansen plays out.

"There are those of us with three jobs and those of us with three houses," she said. "It only works if we help each other. Someone buys her dress at Gucci, wears it two times and donates it for the tax deduction. The \$50 I buy it for goes back to the community and helps out the charities in the whole Roaring Fork Valley."

Gabianelli's resentment-free analysis explains the good feelings that keep this shop humming.

*The Thrift Shop, 422 E. Hopkins Ave., Aspen, CO 81611. 970-925-3121. [aspenthriftshop.org](http://aspenthriftshop.org)*

*Open 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Monday through Saturday. (On the second Monday of each month, open noon – 3 p.m.; on the first Tuesday of each month open 4:30 – 7 p.m.)*





*Don't miss the Fire Museum next to the thrift shop.*