

Aspen Thrift Shop Celebrates 75 Years

Local Love

The women-run bargain basement fundraiser uncovers gems that flow back into the community.

By [Amanda Rae](#) June 12, 2024 Published in the [summer/fall 2024](#) issue of *Aspen Sojourner*



Left to right: Susan Proctor, Bobbi Carson, Peggy Amory, Susan Bernard, Becky Ward, and Nancy Ferguson

Like the great "Buttermilk Glacier" that lingers long after ski season, the pile of donations outside the [Aspen Thrift Shop](#) never seems to disappear. And

that's despite the considerable effort of some 200 volunteers, all women, who work in shifts of 6 to 10 people per day to help pare down this mountain of used goods, uncovering gems that flow back into the community.

Tuesday through Saturday, inside the three-floor store next to the fire station on Hopkins Avenue, lucky shoppers might find Italian leather men's shoes, size 16; an intact, 1960s stained-glass window; mint-condition couture gowns, bespoke suits, and vintage ski ensembles; a new-in-box espresso machine; or barely used expedition gear, among myriad curated articles of clothing, accessories, books, art, and housewares.

"We got a weird thing that looked like a life preserver," recalls Operations Coordinator Cinnamon Hughes. A colleague whose daughter has cystic fibrosis happened to be scheduled to work her once-every-other-week volunteer shift that day. "She had been driving her kid to school [who complained] that she needed a bigger [ventilator] vest, and this was the right size," Hughes marvels. "We wouldn't have even known what it was!"

The "Thrift" has been recirculating gently used goods—as well as the money that sales raise, currently \$640,000 in microgrants and scholarships annually—for 75 years, making it one of the town's longest-running fundraisers (after the St. Patrick's Day Benefit Dinner at St. Mary Catholic Church, in its 138th year). It originally opened in 1949 across the street, to raise money for medical equipment and nurse salaries at Citizens Hospital. Before settling in its present location on East Hopkins Avenue, the store moved twice in the 1960s (first to the Armory building, then the Wheeler Opera House), along the way supporting the first kindergarten at the Red Brick School (now Red Brick Center for the Arts), the Aspen Ski Club (now AVSC), and community amenities like an ice rink snowplow and park picnic umbrellas.

Today, customers find nearly anything except large furniture and appliances, tires, mattresses, knives, and helmets (these items, and other outcast donations, are diverted from the landfill and sent to secondhand shops elsewhere). "The Aspen community is so generous," Hughes says. "The shop is always full, with the wackiest stuff."

Hughes represents the third of four generations of Aspen Thrift Shop volunteers. Her grandmother, Alberta Moore—whose portrait hangs by the stairs leading to womenswear and children's apparel—was instrumental in founding the nonprofit. "My mother started working there when I went to preschool, and she has worked there consistently for 53 years," adds Hughes, whose college-age daughter pitches in, too. Some Aspen High School students fulfill community service hours through stints at the Thrift.

Except for items from the designer-clothing "boutique" rack, prices are left to the discretion of cashiers working the register but generally are capped at \$15. Wielding the power of the purse is just one of the perks of working a high-profile local job without a paycheck.

"We're a sisterhood," Hughes enthuses. "It's always been a big honor to be a volunteer. The ripple effect of our work touches everybody in our community up and down the Roaring Fork Valley and beyond. I believe in our community, and we're still here."

Aspen Thrift Shop 10th Anniversary Art Sale

Aug 10, 10 a.m.–2 p.m.

Red Brick Center for the Arts

110 E Hallam St #118