



Photo by Shu-Shing Chen

Second-hand clothing, an inexpensive alternative to name-brand wear, is becoming an increasingly popular and accepted form of dress in Eugene. (Clothes courtesy of Second Thoughts Too).

Secondhand stores improve look

By Kristi Holden
Emerald Contributor

I don't know about the rest of you, but as a student shopping for school clothes, I was somewhat dissatisfied with recent department store offerings. My criteria were simple: comfortable clothes that looked good and didn't cost too much.

What I discovered was that almost everything was in earth-tones and black, (which are certainly good colors, but I like red), and that scratchy acrylic sweaters can cost more than \$50.

Disgruntled, I rebelled and went to a favorite haunt of mine, St. Vincent de Paul. Thumbing through the men's

areas of advertising, image promoting, and setting quality standards. The group has printed a small pamphlet featuring brief information on each store and a map charting store locations.

For the sake of convenience, the armchair tour I'm leading will move from the campus area outward. Several of the shops are located close to each other, making it easy to do a lot of browsing in one afternoon.

Rags to Riches at 360 E. 11th Ave. has evolved over the years from a vintage-oriented store to a contemporary clothing store. Owner Gail Hutchinson watched the demand for vintage in her shop dwindle and began incorporating more contemporary items — and sales improved.

and school clothes near by. The vintage section along the wall is a fun source of bargains, as is the newly established "new wave" section that features a growing inventory of modern styles.

Prices range from 10 cents to \$50 for a unique jacket or evening dress. Halloween is a major event at the store, taking weeks of preparation and costume accumulation. Clerks dress up in full regalia while serving the year's largest influx of customers.

Says Bearden, "This is our busiest but favorite time of year. It's a blast."

Starting Over deals with a blend of vintage and contemporary clothing, catering to office workers, students, and shoppers from its convenient location at 1077 Willamette St. Owner Vikki Chapman sells mostly natural fiber garments dated three years and later, with some vintage dating to the 1950s and earlier.

The store features an entire room devoted to men's clothing and a large cage filled with chirping finches. Prices range on an average from \$5 to \$10 for blouses, pants and skirts, and more for suits and coats.

New items arrive at the store everyday, enticing shoppers to drop in several times a week, Chapman says. **Starting Over** is perhaps best known as "that store with the bird." The bird is Birdie, a male African Gray parrot who whistles, barks, meows, and offers his opinion on everything. "He's a good thing to have, he draws in customers," Chapman says.

Birdie also entertains waiting men and restless youngsters while women try on clothes. Chapman remarks, "One day I was walking by his cage and he said, 'Yeah, I work here.' And he does."

Down the street at 1022 Willamette St. is **Old Friends**, a vintage-oriented store that recently moved into the newly renovated McDonald building from its close quarters near 11th

Rags to Riches features items from such makers as Liz Claiborne, Benetton, and Guess and attracts students and working women alike, Hutchinson says. The shop contains everything from jewelry to lingerie, and has several racks devoted to men's clothing. One of the most established and popular resale shops in town, **Rags to Riches**, keeps Hutchinson busy as she bustles around the shop, helping customers with a ready smile.

Although a non-profit donation store rather than a resale shop, **St. Vincent DePaul** at 11th and Oak Street reflects the current trend of image improvement among the resale industry. Store manager Lisa Bearden says that the store's staff are selective about what is sold, and have created specialty sections throughout the store to appeal to customers.

New arrivals are prominently displayed near the front of the store, with racks of "executive"

'I think it's great that Starting Over, Old Friends and Second Thoughts Too are within walking distance of each other. I don't feel it's competition, it's complimentary.'

— Sheila Showalter

sweaters, I found it: a cranberry-colored 100 percent alpaca cardigan with tailored button detail, in mint condition, for \$3.50. I snickered all the way to the cash register.

I've since rediscovered an alternative to the department store: second-hand, or resale, shops. In the past two years, Eugene resale shops have been undergoing several changes in an effort to improve image and sales. Gone is the hole-in-the-wall shop crammed with anything more than 15 years old.

Vintage clothing still exists, but it occupies clean, organized space. The emphasis now is on contemporary clothing, and local merchants agree that their objective is to stock quality clothing at prices acceptable to the budget-conscious public.

The Resale Connection, a group of 18 resale shops in Eugene and Springfield, was formed six months ago in an effort to network the shops in



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