

Urban Senior: Friendly thrift store offers rare finds

Clothes and Collectibles funds West End seniors programs

[Wanyee Li](#) / Vancouver Courier

May 27, 2014 12:23 PM



Darlene Dranfield is the store manager at Clothes and Collectibles, a West End thrift store that relies on donations and gives its proceeds to the West End Seniors' Network. Photo Dan Toulgoet

Every day 72-year-old Gary Malo walks into his favourite thrift shop and looks around to see if anything catches his eye. He's looking for Buddha statues.

"I like Buddha statues, that's what I look for first," he said. "They only come in once in a while." But the main reason why he goes to the store every day is because of the people who work there. "They find my inner soul," he said, chuckling.

Clothes and Collectibles first opened 14 years ago and has been providing the West End community with affordable and unique items ever since. All of its proceeds go toward the West End Seniors' Network, which runs programs including at-home care, support for LGBT seniors and language classes.

Clothes and Collectibles is run by three managers and about 20 volunteers. It accepts donations, which works well because of the neighbourhood.

Many West End residents are mobile, according to store manager Darlene Dranfield. When they move apartments, they often give items that don't fit in their new home to Clothes and Collectibles. Dranfield also cites rising rent as a cause of downsizing, which tends to result in donations to the thrift store.

“Ninety-nine per cent of our stuff is from local people, mobile families, and through family members passing on,” said Dranfield.

Veronica Cranston-Smith visits the store at least once a day whether she needs to buy something or not. “I need the exercise, otherwise my knees will lock up. I’ve got terrible arthritis,” she said. Like many seniors, she enjoys the social aspect of going out to shop. “I always enjoy going to the mall because I’ve met so many of my friends there, and so many of them are at the store.” The thrift store makes sense to her from a practical standpoint, too. She explained that she can afford to not try the clothes on — if she doesn’t like it she can simply donate it back to the store.

Besides the exercise and practicality of Clothes and Collectibles, Cranston-Smith has a soft spot for the store. “I try to support them as much as possible. The store does a very good job of greeting everyone and making them feel good. Quite often it’s jammed with people because it’s social exercise for them,” said the 83-year-old pancreatic cancer survivor. For seniors who may live alone and have limited mobility, socializing with others is extremely important, according to Dranfield.

“Part of the philosophy of the store is that yes we are a business and we’re trying to make money to support our seniors. But we’re also a support system for the community. We have people who come in just to have a chat. We have people who come in for a hug. They get a smile. We remember their names. We remember their children,” Dranfield said.

The store is so well known in the community that receiving enough donations to keep the store running is not a problem, according to Dranfield. Even items that the store uses for packaging like wrapping paper and shopping bags are donated. In fact, Clothes and Collectibles receive so many donations that it cannot sell all of the items at the store. Some items are transferred to other thrift stores or to auctions if the item is a high-value antique or collectable.

Dranfield noted amazing items have been brought in, including 100-year-old dish sets from France and penny banks from American banks in the early 1920s. The penny banks are worth thousands of dollars now, according to Dranfield.

For Malo, the store is full of unexpected treasures.

“I like surprises,” he said. “You never know what you’re going to find.” So far he has 12 Buddha statues at home, all found at Clothes and Collectibles.

twitter.com/wanyeelii

© Vancouver Courier

- See more at: <http://www.vancourier.com/living/seniors/urban-senior-friendly-thrift-store-offers-rare-finds-1.1076896#sthash.aZbVDBWi.dpuf>