

# Local Secondhands draw all types

By DEBBIE NELSON  
Battalion Staff

At the end of two dusty streets in downtown Bryan sit two stores filled with a collage of secondhand clothing.

The streets may seem quiet except for an occasional passerby, but the cars and trucks parked outside the stores hint at the activity inside.

The stores—Hearts Bargain Mart and Twin City Mission Helping Hand—are busy.

Three college women amble into the store and mingle with the two men and the Spanish man who are searching through racks of clothes and rows of shoes.

Looking for costume party outfits, one of the three women spots some pants and says, "We could go with that." Laughing, they all move to the coat racks.

"My mother used to have a coat like this," one coed says. You know, it isn't bad. You could find a pretty one.

"But I want a tacky one."

Another one says, "Here's a purple one."

"No," the first replies, "that's too tacky."

The Spanish man says to one of the girls, "If you run across a pair of pants, let me know. They're for a man, she's about 400 pounds."

A button-down-collared college student going to a costume party asks, "How late do ya'll stay open?" he asks.

"We close the door at 4:30," the clerk replies.

"I'll be back later with some other people," he says, making a speedy exit.

Another clerk lugs a box of clothes into the storeroom. A stray brown hat cap hugs her head, the cap's tail bouncing along behind her.

A woman and her son say hello to the clerks as they come in the door. The mother sorts through piles of clothes.

Three "children of God" dressed only in thin white cotton gowns and ponchos made of green Army blankets enter the store.

One of the long-haired, white-headed disciples searches for blankets in a nondescript pile of garments. Holding up a green filmy curtain, he looks like an actor in a Biblical movie, and rather out of place in a Bryan secondhand store.

Through it all, the clerks remain unfazed, as if this is a normal working day.

At Hearts, only a block away, the scene is much the same. Actually, business is a little better than usual. It's Halloween week and extra customers are in the store looking for costumes.

A back storeroom was full of clothes, but Lemon said Hearts almost ran out of clothes most in demand for costumes.

"It's mostly old-timey stuff they want—Roaring 20s. The guys get stuff for gangster costumes."

Besides maintaining this continuous source of clothing (and costumes) the two stores put profits back into the community by helping the needy and the handicapped.

At Twin City, a temporary emergency shelter for abused and battered women, is supported by profits from the mission secondhand store. Men from the mission's rehabilitation program who work in the store are paid a small fee and receive free room and board for their work.

Other men in the program drive the trucks which pick up donated clothing, furniture and canned goods. Joan Sebesta, secretary of Twin City Mission, Inc., said, "If it wasn't for people calling in donations, we wouldn't be in business." Pick-ups of donations can be arranged by calling 822-7511.

"Our first goal is to help needy families," Sebesta said. Victims of house fires, for example, receive free clothing and furniture from the mission store.

Hearts (Handicapped Employment and Rehabilitation Training

Society) eventually will employ 25 to 50 handicapped people either at the store or in assembly-line small industry, Floyd Wells, Hearts president, said.

"This is set up to aid and assist the handicapped, with recreational facilities and activities," Wells said. Hearts' donation pick-ups can be arranged by calling 822-5226.

Twin City Mission's secondhand store is 15 years old, while Hearts has been open only about a year.

Although the stores are only one block apart, they claim they don't compete with each other.

"There's no competition," Sebesta said. "Our things are priced so low, or we give the things away."

Lemon said, "Maybe somebody'll

come in and say, 'Your stuff's too high,' then the next one says, 'Well, I'll come here all the time. Your stuff's cheaper.'"

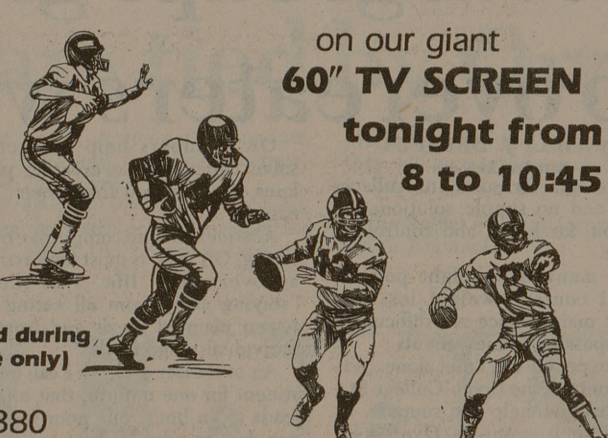
Clothes at the stores are as diverse as the assortment of people who shop there. Selection ranges from fringed yellow bikinis to men's suits to psychedelic '60s minidresses to green satin formals. And throw in some jewelry, a few red alligator shoes, old fur coats, some straw handbags and a few striped ties.


It's a tangle of accents, patterns, colors and textures variegated enough to inspire a little chill of discovery in almost anyone.

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