

Thrift Tip: Thrift Shops are Thrifty

Philadelphia Profile in Thrift: [CiRCLE THRiFT](#)

“That’s a really big focus: trying to live simply.”
—Bess Hunter Gerig, Manager

Thrift Tip of the Day: Instead of throwing away stuff you don’t want, donate it.

Fast Facts

- Raised \$100,000 in 2010 to give away
- Part of the proceeds go to local projects like a playground, a kid’s club, a cultural center for youth, an urban farm, a community garden, and a settlement house for the elderly
- Provides transitional employment and job skills to individuals looking for work after an injury or period of unemployment

How the New Thrift Shops Why Thrift Shops Are Thrifty

Thrift shops are a thrift exemplar:

- Green (reuse old items instead of buying new)
- Financially savvy (where else can you get outfits for less than five bucks?)
- Community minded (thrift shops encourage volunteerism and fund non-profit work)

Learn More about CiRCLE THRiFT An Interview with Bess Hunter Gerig, Manager at the Fishtown location

How did CiRCLE THRiFT get started?

“Martha Grace [the current director] started it—didn’t really know much about business or anything, but just wanted to give it a try. So we teamed up with the Mennonite Central Committee. They have thrift stores all around the US and Canada.”

We saw that you met your goal of giving away \$100,000 in 2010. How did you do it?

“Really the only way that’s possible is through community involvement which has been phenomenal over the last few years.”

Who shops at CiRCLE THRiFT?

“It’s incredibly varied, much like the neighborhood. Lots of young people who have migrated here. Lots of people who have been here for generations. We also do vouchers for different churches and non-profits that send people to us that are in need. We do fire vouchers so that people who have lost their homes to fires can come get blankets or clothes or whatever they need really.”

Tell us about one of the organizations you support.

“[The Lutheran Settlement House for senior citizens] is near and dear to my heart because a majority of them are our customers. It’s this wonderful circular motion. They do so much for us and then thankfully we’re able to do a little bit for them as well.”

Is the CiRCLE THRiFT staff volunteer-based?

“One of the things that we really wanted to do is be able to provide flexible jobs for decent pay. So we actually have nine paid staff at the Fishtown location and more paid staff at the location in South Philly.”

Tell us about one of your employees.

“One of the backbones to our store came to us through court-ordered community service five years ago. She makes us what we are for the most part. I mean this woman is phenomenal. She does more in one hour than ten people can do.”

What is Circle Thrift’s relationship to Circle of Hope?

“Circle Thrift is essentially a compassion ministry of Circle of Hope. Circle of Hope has all these various compassion ministries, including Circle Thrift, an urban farm team, and a debt annihilation team. That’s a really big focus in Circle of Hope: trying to live simply.”

What’s your favorite thing about working at CiRCLE THRiFT?

[Bess Hunter Gerig]: “All the employees are really close, and once you get to know the customers it becomes really a tight knit community.”

[An employee busy joking with a customer]: “I love all of our regular customers. Just getting to interact with our neighbors. And I really believe in the cause—what our profits go for. I just feel like I’m a part of something.”

[An employee busy pricing a donated wedding dress]: “The people that work here are really amazing. We’re all just really close and support each other. And, of course, I like the clothes.”

Information courtesy of www.newthrift.org

