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Business as usual at city's secondhand stores

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It was a typical Friday at area thrift shops.

Secondhand store managers said the day of discounts was like every other day of the year at their establishments — demand was high and items were up for sale at bargain prices.

"It's busy today but normally the lot is full this time of the day," said Tammy Call, manager of the Rutland Salvation Army Thrift Store on Main Street.

"There have been a lot more people coming in than we have seen in the past because of the way the economy is right now," she said.

Tasha Wallis, executive director of the Vermont Retail Association, said a growing customer base at the Salvation Army in Rutland and other secondhand stores statewide is indicative of a national trend — one that exceeds the post-holiday shopping craze.

"Consumers are willing to spend at secondhand stores because parents may be holding back on buying for themselves and spending more on their children" this holiday season, Wallis said.

"They (parents) may be more willing to buy something used or secondhand for themselves."

At the Salvation Army, where there was a 50 percent discount on clothes with certain tags and books were eight for a \$1, Becky Matthews of Bellows Falls picked up household items and literature with her 13-year-old son Jamie in tow, then traveled down the street to Good Cents Thrift Store and Consignment shop for jackets, boots and other Christmas gifts for her family of four.

On Friday, Good Cents had a 15 percent off sale on all items in the store.

"If I go to Walmart I don't get the quality, here there's quality," Becky said, a hardly worn, brand-name winter coat cradled over her arm.

Son Jamie said he didn't mind getting a secondhand Christmas present and his other family members didn't either.

"It's to save money," he said.

"They're (secondhand clothes) perfectly good, why throw them away?"

Michelle Rock, microbusiness development program manager for BROCC Community Action in Southwestern Vermont, said "thrift is the new cool" anytime of the year and the growing business at Good Cents is indicative of it.

"There's been a big increase in sales and donations," Rock said.

"The store has certainly improved and the economy has a lot to do with it."

But the popularity of Rock's shop does come with a down side. On Friday, one woman, bearing two bags of soon-to-be donated clothing, was turned away because the shop was short on space to store and display new donations.

Rock said the shop is always looking for new customers to sustain its nonprofit operation and Black Friday was a good day for that.

"It gave them (bargain shoppers) an opportunity to see that we are there," Rock said.

Wallis reported that in September, consumer retail spending in Vermont fell close to 9 percent.

From what she's heard so far, Wallis said Vermonters were "definitely out and about shopping." She said it was too early to tell how Black Friday sales affected the state's statistics.

However, at secondhand stores many consumers can get a two-for-one deal and that's one reason why the shops are doing so well, Wallis said.

"People are looking for bargains and extra cash for the holidays," she said.

"They're cleaning out their closets ... at many stores, the individual brings in clothing and makes a percentage of the sale."

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