

The store where thrift becomes a gift

BY TONI GARRARD CLAY



One of the most fun experiences you'll have shopping in Henderson County is at an unassuming place called the Athens Thrift Store. If you've ever boasted about finding a set of dishes for practically nothing or hoped to repeat an I've-been-looking-for-this-forever moment, this is the place for you.

As store manager Matthew Akin confidently states: "If I can get a customer to come in here, I can guarantee they're coming back."

It's not an empty boast. Customers such as Robert and Joanne Polodna of Murchison say they shop at the thrift store every week.

The main factor behind the non-profit store's growing success is its treasure-hunt allure. The prices are nearly impossible to beat, and there's no telling what you'll find.

Sure, there are your standard thrift store items. You'll find cassette tapes (this writer bought one), luggage and shoes. They also have a fairly steady stream of items such as good, even antique-store-worthy furniture, working appliances and decorative pieces. There is also the very real possibility of making a great discovery — such as a silver candle set for \$5. (Yes, there really was.)

"It's not just the prices," says assistant manager Dana Medina. "It's also the conversation. We see a ton of regulars. People tell us about their families; it's a friendly place to be."

Akin admits sometimes they sell an item for very little because they don't recognize its value. Other times they're aware of an item's value but price it for much less in order to move it out quickly.

"Just the other day we sold a Capodimonte Italian porcelain art piece for \$200," said Akin. "A similar piece was valued on eBay at \$1,200. The woman who

bought it was very excited when she saw it.”

But what makes the Athens Thrift Store truly noteworthy, and some regulars aren't even aware of, is the simple but wonderful fact that it exists purely to give its profit away.

Since the Athens Thrift Store opened its doors in August 2010, it has gifted \$30,000 among 11 non-profit organizations in Henderson County: ETMC Athens Auxiliary (which helps staff the store with volunteers), Disciple's Clinic of Athens, Young Life Henderson County, Ruby's Safe Haven, Family Peace Project, Henderson County Food Pantry, Meals of Kindness, Clothes Closet, Furniture Ministry, East Texas Crisis Center, and Recovery by the Cross.

The creation of the Athens Thrift Store can be



Pictured are Athens Thrift Store assistant manager Dana Medina, store CEO Drew Douglas and manager Matthew Akin.

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credited to local real estate broker Drew Douglas.

“I wanted to find something I could do that would help people here in Henderson County and wouldn't cost anybody anything to support,” he explains.

Douglas spoke to a college friend who had opened a thrift store in Brenham to support various goodwill endeavors.

“As soon as I heard about that, it clicked,” he says. “I visited the store in Brenham in January of 2010,



and by August we were open here.”

The store is not church-affiliated, Douglas points out.

“This is for the community by the community,” he says. “People can bring their things here without it costing them a penny. We sell their things, and then we give the money to organizations that help people. People are helping others without it costing them an extra dime. That’s the beauty of it.”

Even though the thrift store's profile is on the rise, Douglas points out there is a constant need for three things: shoppers, donations and volunteer workers to help keep things running smoothly.

“It’s a fun place to give your time,” says Medina, who volunteered at the thrift store before becoming a full-time employee. 🇺🇸

Go. Shop. Give.

The Athens Thrift Store is located at 1419A E. Tyler Street, two doors east of Whataburger. For more information, call 903-675-3160.