The little Thrift Shop that could

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Published: Tuesday, February 22, 2011
Updated: Tuesday, February 22, 2011 23:02

Thousands of volunteer hours have enabled Thrift Shop, on Mānoa's upper campus, to celebrate forty years of grant giving—totaling nearly half a million dollars.

Organized originally as one-day fundraisers, the Women's Campus Club used these events to promote scholarship and fellowship, and to provide support to the University of Hawai'i—the heart of the shop's mission.

"The Women's Campus Club [through the shop] has been a steady supporter of the university and its students," said UH Foundation spokesperson Margot Schrire. "The forward thinking women who make up the club have volunteered their time and energy working at the thrift shop."

With proceeds in the early years going almost exclusively toward the support of the newly opened day care center, the shop has consistently raised funds to support the center, including multi-baby strollers and new playground surfaces. Past grants have also funded a cello for the Music Department, costs of landscaping around campus buildings, and books and computers for the library system. Presently, support runs the gamut, including shark tags and wheelchairs at the Waikīkī aquarium, as well as various other items that would otherwise go unfunded by the university.

"We actually work to promote the UH community statewide …the entire system is served, from Maui to Hilo," said store manager Annette Hee. "Our biggest problem has been a lack of space for storage …we have to get a PODS storage system soon just to keep up with the steady stream of donations."

Space has always been at a premium for this thriving enterprise zone, and a tour revealed a treasure trove of goodies—from books to clothing, and electronics to dishware. Erin MacDermott, a recent hospitality school graduate who has been coming in for several months, reported that every day is a new find.

"I shop for all kinds of things, even presents," said MacDermott, as she browsed the shelves. "Recently I..."
picked up eight National Geographics on marine biology for a friend's present ... What I really like is finding unique things that not everyone else has."

Originally housed at the back porch of the present day UH Credit Union, the shop paid $20 per month for rent and utilities. A little nagging and a lot of persistence went a long way toward their efforts, and the store enjoyed its grand opening, including punch and cookies, in October 1971.

Business remained steady and included donations from major retailers Liberty House, Ben Franklin's, and JC Penny's. When the credit union expanded in the late 1970's, the shop moved its operation across the street and into what had been an animal sciences building. Help came in from across the campus, including the school of architecture and the job-training CETA program, which provided invaluable carpentry, plumbing, and electrical services to refurbish the space.

Unofficial historian Lenore Johnson recalled then UH President Al Simone's wife, Carolie, who hauled out a ladder and pail, and carried it down from College Hill so that she could hand wash the shop windows for the store's grand re-opening.

The shop and the Women's Campus Club definitely have a following, including volcanologist and guest speaker for this year's luncheon, Floyd McCoy and Wendie McClain, wife of former UH President David McClain, who attended this year's scholarship luncheon. "I've been associated with the Women's Campus Club for many years," said McCoy, "I know their good work and I'm proud to support their efforts."

These efforts include countless hours of cooperation as volunteers provide the manpower for sorting, pricing, and sales during the week, with an end of month sale on the last Saturday of each month, when everything is 50% off.

Finding the store could get a little tricky, but the trip and the treats are well worth it. Just follow East-West road to the end, take a left at the sign posted "Thrift Shop", and continue down until you see the credit union. Official sales hours are Tuesday and Thursday, and the last Saturday of each month. However, volunteer sorters and taggers are also in on Monday and Friday, and patrons are welcome anytime the door is open.

"The Women's Campus Club provides a host of service events, with various activities, such as playing bridge, hiking and the annual fall tea," said club president, Dr. Jacqueline Maly. "But the thrift shop is special in itself because it touches so many lives, in so many ways across the islands."