

From finding treasures to fresh starts, Gillette thrift store holds it all

Gillette (Wyoming) Thrift Store powers Salvation Army services.

Every morning before Bec Pelz starts a volunteer shift at The Salvation Army Thrift Store in Gillette, Wyoming, she sits and prays in her car for the encounters ahead.

“We just want to love everybody and make everybody feel that they’re important,” she said. “We depend on the people who come in here and buy things in our thrift store because that’s what keeps our mission going.”



The thrift store is the engine for [The Salvation Army’s work in Gillette](#), and is powered by volunteers who aim to help shoppers find just what they’re looking for—and feel like family along the way.

Last year, the thrift store netted \$184,000, which The Salvation Army Gillette Service Extension [Director Jenny Hartung](#) said goes directly to client services, covering one paid staff position, rent and about \$10,000 worth of food a month.

In Gillette, a town of some 30,000 people, The Salvation Army distributes over 2,000 food boxes a month.

“We have a huge food pantry—it’s a very big need here,” Hartung said. “So it’s really important then to have good people manage the store.”

And that’s where volunteers, like Pelz, come in. Hartung said she has set the tone of the shop, starting with her effort to genuinely extend a warm welcome to everyone who comes through the door.

“Everyone is treated as if we’ve invited them over to our home for dinner and we’re so happy to see them,” Hartung said.

“We never run from a position of have not. We always run from a position of have and share.”

Jenny Hartung

The thrift store sits on the ground floor of The Salvation Army's 15,000 square foot presence in Gillette and focuses on maintaining an inventory of items people would need to set up a home or productively contribute to society.

"What we figured out is that if we price it to sell then it moves, and then we get another piece in. God just provides," Hartung said. "Every single time I think, 'Gosh, this whole room's empty.' Next thing you know, a guy will pull up with a whole van full of antiques and fill it right back up."

She added, "We never run from a position of have not. We always run from a position of have and share."

Much of the sharing comes through honoring vouchers provided to individuals and families participating in case management who are transitioning to permanent housing. Last year, about \$22,000 worth of vouchers were redeemed at the store.

"When people come in and they get a voucher toward some housewares or clothing, everybody gets excited to be able to help them," Pelz said.

She recalled one mom who was new to town and needed bedding for her kids.

"We were able to help her get all set up," Pelz said. "It was enjoyable to see the look on her face and her kids' faces when they got all these things to help them set up their home."

Sometimes the job looks like helping an individual find a new pair of shoes they need to start their next job.

"Steel-toed boots for guys are huge," Pelz said. "We'll see what we can find for them."

The work is relational—Pelz knows the store's regulars and what they're looking for. If she finds something that fits the bill, she'll call them up.

"It brings a lot of joy to just see people get treasures," she said. "You're excited when you're checking them out and ringing them up—telling them 'Oh this is really cute!' 'I love that!' and just being happy with them and for them when they buy their purchases."

Checkout is where it all comes together for many shoppers. There, a sign reads: "All of your purchases help fund our food pantry, so thank you for feeding our neighbors in need."

The result? An organic round-up program. Often, Pelz said she's told "Oh, keep the change. Just put it in the till for the food pantry."

"We can get \$10, \$15, \$20 a day in spare change from people just saying, 'That's OK, you keep the change.' And every little bit helps," she said.

In January, the store collected \$262 from shoppers' round-up donations alone.

“They’re willing to give, too,” Pelz said. “They understand how important it is.”

Do Good:

- The Salvation Army is dedicated to alleviating hunger in our community. By working together, we can ensure that everyone has access to the food they need to thrive. [See more here.](#)