

Many resalers aren't suffering the recession blues

By Carolyn DeMarco
staff writer

WHEN THE GOING gets tough, the tough go shopping, or so the bumper sticker philosophers proclaim. But what happens when the going gets really, really tough, like in the here and now: Oakland County, January 1992.

Do the tough tough go shopping in the resale shops? Does the market for used items increase, bringing up profits? Or do resale shops suffer the same woes as regular retailers? Depends on who you ask.

We asked, among others, Cookie Koblin, owner of Bloomfield-Keego Resale in Keego Harbor. "We're holding our own, doing better than most," she said. The consignment shop has been around for 17 years and had its peak year in 1989. "Ninety and '91 are somewhat down," she said.

"Our (selling) customers seem to be hanging onto their clothes longer but we are seeing some (sellers) for the first time. They've found they can recycle them for money. They're selling them rather than give them away."

THE STORE is also seeing first-time buyers. "They're looking for bargains, making their dollars go farther. This week we sold a \$700 leather dress for \$100 to a young woman who needed clothes for a new job. She'd discovered you can get five suits for the cost of one new."

Sought after items are good women's pants suits, golf clothes, cocktail dresses, leather purses and belts and shoes and anything with a known label — Gap, Esprit, Ann Taylor, Liz Claiborne.

Shoppers come from all walks of life, Koblin said. "They are people who know a good buy. They're tough, astute — not poor people. They know you can buy cheaper clothes at Kmart, but then it's not an Anne Klein."

Treasure Trunk on Woodward in Birmingham has been in business for 18 years. Owner Joan Stamps says, while business hasn't taken off in the recession, there hasn't been a decrease in the sales of the consignment shop.

YET, THERE IS one change. "I'm seeing lots of new people who wouldn't think resale in another climate."

Many patrons are career women who can't afford to buy new, Stamps said. "As I look back over the years, there's been an upgrading in economic status of the customer. They are housewives, career women, a wide spectrum from all over southeastern Michigan."

Customers are label conscious in every respect, Stamps said, perhaps more so in purses than anything else, preferring Gucci and Mark Cross, walking advertisements of the designer.

Some best buys at Treasure Trunk include a scarlet Claire Pearon suit at \$225, an off-white crepe suit by Sonia Rykiel at \$80 and a Ralph Lauren blazer first marked at \$150, then down to \$120, then \$75. Items that don't sell are placed in the back-room. One sample — an Evan Picone wool jumper for \$8.

WHAT'S NOT selling, now are fur. Still hanging are a raccoon short coat at \$350 and a beaver jacket at \$325.

In the same block on Woodward for the past nine years is Valerie Taylor Fashion Resale. Owner Paul Taylor said 1990 was "a slow year but not desperate," and 1991 was up slightly.

In general, resale is subject to exactly the same problems of the new retail market," Taylor said. "When times are great, business is great. When times are slow, business is slow. It's not necessarily true that people go to resale in bad times. There is a resale shopper and there is a shopper that wouldn't be caught dead in a resale shop. When times are tough we don't see the regular buyers as often. They become more careful with their dollars."

Valerie Taylor is not a consignment shop. Taylor pays cash, usually to regulars who call every season. He turns down 90 percent of what is offered. A typical buy, Taylor said, is a dress that originally sold for \$80 and now costs \$150. Good buys included a Vicky Tiel black, sequined, keyhole backed dress, size 6. It originally sold for \$2,330. Now it's \$159. A three-piece Chanel suit, black, size 10 is \$375.

CHARITY SHOPS have their own problems. Donations are down at the 42-year-old Junior Club of Birmingham's Bargain Box, probably the biggest reason for a 6 percent decline in sales. "People are wearing their clothes a little longer," said manager Jean Dooley.

There is no decline in the number of customers. "People who need to shop here will shop here," she said.

At the Opportunity Shop in Birmingham's St. James Episcopal Church, Charlo Smith said in her 27 years at the 33-year-old shop, things have never been stranger. "Usually people come in more when things are bad, but people are being more selective than ever before even with '82 or '83 in mind."

The Opportunity Shop can usually depend on a steady business with few surprises. However December,

which is usually slow was very good. "It's crazy this year, not typical at all. And we've been swamped with donations, more than usual. That's strange, too. You can forget any predictions."

DECEMBER WAS ALSO typical for Solo Records a resale record and tape store on Woodward in Birmingham. If it wasn't for the after Christmas sales they'd be sunk, said manager Lorna Kuschel. "This (1991) was the first year we did not have an increase over the previous year," she said.

One problem, she said, is not related to the economy but to technology. The shop is 80 percent vinyl records in a world that's become compact disc-oriented. The store has begun to recycle CDs, none higher than \$9.95. "It's caused us to start selling some new discs and for the small retailer there's no money in that."

Business is slow at the Bridal Exchange in Waterford, but the resale side of the business is increasing slightly, said Donna Falk. One difference the recession has wrought is extended layaway terms and special payment plans even for the used

bridal gowns that range from \$99 to \$500.

One used goods retailer who is enjoying boom times is Steve Kopitz, owner of two Play It Again Sports franchises, one in Keego Harbor. "We're up 50 percent from last year (this first)."

THEY SELL 60 percent used merchandise, 40 percent new and are doing a great business currently in skates and skis and hockey equipment priced at 50 to 75 percent off the initial retail price.

"More people are buying and

more people are selling," Kopitz said, although he's not sure it's a direct result of the recession, the down times haven't hurt, he said.

"I don't know how to measure it," he said, "whether it's because of the popularity of the sports business, or recycling or that people are more conscious of saving money and not wanting to waste."

Customers are "more affluent than you'd think," he said. "It's pretty surprising to see all the Mercedes pull up in front. Just because they have money doesn't mean they throw it away."

Tailors and cobblers show a profit

By Carolyn DeMarco
staff writer

Like most small business owners, Herma Griesser keeps her eye on the economic barometers. Unlike her counterparts, however, Griesser finds when the profits of others go down, hers go up.

She's owner of Griesser Tailors of Bloomfield Hills, specializing in alterations. Business is good, so good that she's about to move to quarters double the size, just around the corner on Telegraph at Long Lake Road.

"I've been through recessions before," Griesser said. "It helps my business ... Business is never down."

Griesser's clientele is 80 percent women, most of them from the Birmingham-Bloomfield-West Bloom-

field area. "They bring in everything — designer clothes, less expensive clothes. You cannot pinpoint it."

INSTEAD OF buying new they are restoring, updating, changing the look of dresses, letting seams out, bringing them in, Griesser said. The average cost to shorten a skirt is \$16, she said.

Griesser was certain a recession existed last summer. "We usually slow down in summer and then see an increase from September through Christmas but this year it never slowed down. We try to cut back to eight-hour days (in summer) instead of 10-hour days but we couldn't do it."

Her husband, a school teacher, spends his summers working as her part-time tailor. Part-time became full-time and overtime in the summer of '91.

The recession has had a slight effect on the shoe repair business, said Roger Kashou of Fine Shoe Repair in West Bloomfield. He's seeing more customers bringing in expensive shoes for rehab. Half soles and new heels will cost \$26, Kashou said, and he'll advise when the cost is not worth the effort.

"SOME MENTION

the recession and that it pays to fix rather than throw away, but most people just bring the shoes in without comment," he said.

While those who alter clothing and

repair shoes may profit from down times, dry cleaners do not.

"Business is actually slower when people are out of work," said Gayle Kosmowski of Chase Cleaners in Bloomfield Plaza, Bloomfield Township.

"Last year was a down year," she said. "People were bringing the same things in but not as often. Where they used to bring in suits for pressing and cleaning now they may get them pressed only and wear a few more times before cleaning. Business started going down when everything else started going down."

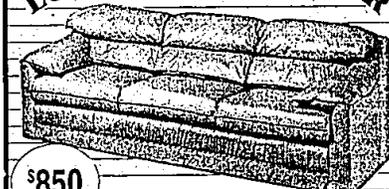
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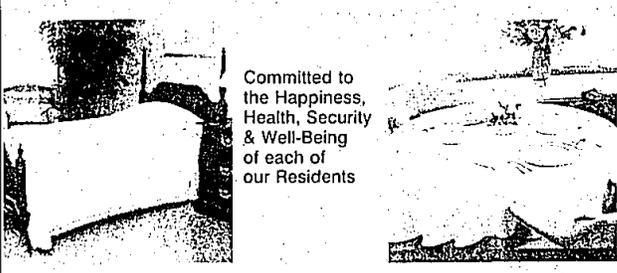
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