

# CASH: Economy spurs consignment shops

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pensive items, presumably so they'll get more of a return when it sells. Like many consignment shops, Second Avenue splits the proceeds from a sale evenly between the store and the person who brought it in. The Coach purse was on the shelf for \$75.

"People want to make a little bit more than a \$7 or \$8 pair of jeans," Almadani said. It doesn't seem to matter that in many cases, they're getting back less than half of what they originally paid.

"Of course you don't get your full price back," she said. But there's more of a "right now" mentality. "To them, it's still money toward their oil."

With gas prices over \$4 per gallon and prices for food and other necessities rising, more people have been interested in selling their stuff. In June, Almadani signed 22 new members, as opposed to the five or six she usually signs in a month. The store also accepts donations for charity, which have been down, probably because most people want money back instead of simply donating, she said.

Sales, however, have been up.

"They want to shop here for the prices," Almadani said.

## New customers

Indeed, Margaret Melanson, owner of Margaret's Place in Danvers, said she expects consignment stores will get busier if the economy continues in the direction it's going. While she hasn't had more people signing up for consignment, she's definitely seen an increase in customers.

"I see a few new faces coming in to shop," she said.

Consignment stores and thrift stores are becoming more popular and seem to be drawing new people in addition to regular customers.

Judy Lescarbeau, a volunteer at the Beverly Bootstraps thrift store, said in the last couple of months she's seen more people paying full price for items. Bootstraps, a nonprofit that runs a food pantry and other community services, offers a half-off discount on items over \$2 to those who qualify for the MassHealth insurance program for low-income residents. Lescarbeau said there's always a lot of people who shop at Bootstraps because of the

discount, but there's been about a 20 percent increase in shoppers who don't have the insurance card.

"People realize they can dress just as well in a thrift store as elsewhere," she said.

Some stores are leaning more toward collecting brand-name clothing.

"That's what people are looking for," Melanson said.

It's especially true at the Re-Run for HAWC Boutique in Beverly, which supports the nonprofit Help for Abused Women and Their Children.

"We're really cutting back on what we can accept, because store space is limited," said Alicia Black, coordinator of communications and events.

Rather than accept any old shirt, they're looking specifically for brands like Talbots, Ann Taylor, Banana Republic and Abercrombie, to name a few. The clothing must be in

good shape and in style. It allows people to still buy from their favorite stores, but at a much lower cost than from the store itself, Black said.

"Logically, you would think people might start looking for a way to save on clothing expenses, and you're getting something that's good quality," she said.

## Designers for less

The Treasure Chest in Marblehead takes quality up a notch with clothing by designers like Marc Jacobs, Carlisle and Coco Chanel.

"We also take stuff from the Gap," said manager Angela Spalding. "Our price ranges are all over the place. You can buy something for \$4, or you can buy something for \$400."

Lately, she's noticed a lot of shoppers who have never been in a consignment shop before, and she's been getting phone calls daily from people looking to sell their clothes.

Five people signed up last week.

The established consigners range from shopaholics who can afford to buy an outfit, wear it a couple of times and drop it off for someone else to buy, to a woman who has her daughter ship over her designer clothes from Los Angeles, Spalding said.

But the recent boom in business comes from people looking to make a few extra bucks.

"Friends are letting friends know they're doing really well consigning their clothes," she said. "It's a great way to get gas money."