

The Entrepreneurs

The function of the clinic auxiliary was to raise money to buy equipment for our medical clinic on Lopez Island and I was the president. There were about thirty of us volunteers, all tired of bake sales and fashion shows. We were looking for an on going fund raiser. In 1982 the population of Lopez was less than a thousand; an island fourteen miles long by five miles wide, accessible only by ferry. After much debate we decided to try starting a thrift shop. This idea was met with mostly dire predictions from husbands of failure due to lack of experience, merchandise, location, and customers but we barged ahead anyway. We found an empty garage $\frac{1}{2}$ block from the post office and the main street of town and it was free. The owner also agreed to let us use her basement to sort and price the clothing. We all went thru our closets for donations and prevailed upon our neighbors, family, and friends on the mainland to do the same. We visited other shops to check their prices and then lowered ours. We built racks and painted and scrounged for carpet and made a sign and we were ready for business.

April 8, 1982 was bright and sunny for our grand opening. The local newspapers had been notified and even our congressman came along with most of the Island population. This was a big happening for little Lopez. The first mishap occurred when a volunteer laid her new leather coat on the back of a chair and we promptly sold it. Fortunately the cashier remembered who bought it and someone drove to her house

and bought it back. Our landlady had a Chinese cooker that she kept next to the garage and we accidentally sold it also to someone off-island. That time we had to race to the ferry and explain our mistake to the poor fellow who was really not happy to part with the bargain he had purchased at our sale.

From the first we knew we had a winner. I spent days on the telephone asking people for an hour or two a month and we ended up with about 200 people working in some capacity (selling, sorting, pricing, cleaning, repairing, appraising, etc.) and that was one-fifth the population of the island. This commitment earned us the volunteer organization award for Washington State presented by the governor and I got to go to Olympia to receive it. Very exciting!

The Lopez Thrift Shop is still going strong. Proceeds over the years have gone to every island organization that is not tax supported. With our profits we have bought baseballs and gloves for the Little League, uniforms for some boy and girl scouts, Thanksgiving Baskets for needy families, money to the community center, senior center, library, and Lions club as well as continued support of the medical clinic.

I moved back to Seattle ten years ago but whenever we visit Lopez I'm allowed to sort and price in the basement and stock the shop for old times sake. A younger group runs it now but the format is unchanged. We have made a quarter of a million dollars from the sale of items priced mostly under \$3.00. It has been a remarkable twenty years and I'm glad I was part of it.

Florence Burke