

Consigners find economy's silver lining

Written by Constance Cooper

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Constance Cooper | Ledger-News

Tony Sotz, of Canton, helps Terry Anderson, co-owner of the Canton furniture consignment shop

Cherokee County's furniture consignment shops are finding the upside of down times.

In March, husband and wife Terry and Betty Anderson opened the upscale consignment store Fun Finds in Canton, never dreaming that five months later they'd already be expanding the store.

"We've been ahead of our budget every month since we opened," said Anderson, an interior designer with 21 years of experience. "I think everyone is looking for a bargain."

Fun Finds specializes in gently used contemporary pieces. Some of the shop's most popular consigners have been foreclosed developers who are liquidating the furniture in their model homes.

"That type of stuff sells quickly," Betty Anderson said. "It's relevant to what people are looking for today but less expensive even than what they would pay even at a Rooms to Go."

Down Interstate 575, in Woodstock, two consignment shops with a calling have opened.

In December, three businesswomen, Lisa Welty, Karen Bennett and Linda Fail, took over the 4,500-square-foot Walmart building on Ga. 92 and opened Woodstock Market.

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“We wanted to create a gathering place where neighbors can buy and sell from each other and support each other until the economy gets better,” Welty said.

Besides building community, the eco-friendly sensibility of “breathing new life into something that might be a little old,” appeals to Welty, a former charity organizer. “If it doesn’t fit somebody’s lifestyle anymore, it might be a fit for someone else’s.”

Welty and Bennett moved to Woodstock from downtown Atlanta, where they’d been running Metro Christian Center, a ministry on the city’s west side. They teamed up with Fail, whom they’d met on the antique furniture circuit, and opened Woodstock Market with the ultimate goal of funding a nonprofit with the shop’s revenues.

Welty envisions the charity as very much in keeping with Woodstock Market’s for-profit mission, helping people have homes they’re proud of. Once the trio of businesswomen have built up a strong enough nest egg, they plan to begin to give gifts of linens, furniture, rent money and help with utilities through their nonprofit and are looking to open a small shop where lower-income families can buy quality furniture in the \$25 to \$50 range.

Not far down Ga. 92, the consignment shop Revive sells furniture, household goods and clothing to fund the mission of Jubilee Church while also forming ties with the Woodstock community.

“We certainly felt that God has blessed us,” Simon Atkins, who runs Revive for the church, said of the business’ success. Revive currently has more than 4,000 consigners and is selling an average of 600 items per day.

Revive is doing so much business that its software company is struggling to manage the volume in the store’s database, Atkins said.

Jubilee Church uses the shop proceeds to fund community projects, such as a homeless outreach program organized by Atkins’ wife, Virginia.

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The shop also has a coffee bar that offers free coffee, cookies and wireless Internet to anyone who wants to drop in.

“It gives us the opportunity to meet people,” Atkins said of the coffee bar. “We have one lady who comes in every day.”

The shop has been so successful at building friends and fellowship, that New Frontiers, the church-planting movement that brought Jubilee to Woodstock, is considering using consignment shops as a vehicle to opening new churches.

“The idea is you would open the store first, serve the community, then start the church,” Atkins said.