

# Back to School bargains for you and the community



Katherine shows Susie one of bargains she plans to bring home.

## By Susie Cohen

"I'm a good shopper. I know the names," says Susie Cumings. But that's not all she knows. This super shopper can also tell you the best place to buy those names at bargain prices.

You don't have to look any further than the shirt she's wearing for proof of her prowess.

"I bought this with the tags still on it," says Cumings. "It's a \$75.00 shirt. Before I went to Nordstroms and paid \$75.00 for it. I think I got this for \$4.99."

And that's just the beginning of the bargain resume Cumings has created.

She says, "One store kids love is Abercrombie. I found

"I enjoy finding that diamond or pearl amongst all this," says Cumings.

But store manager Cheryl Gerner says these days Cumings has company.

"Our customer count has really gone up I think people probably don't realize what we carry and had until the economy went South. Then they found out we had good deals."

"We have about 20 retail stores available for the community to shop at during back-to-school. Goodwill offers item pricing such as jeans for \$7.99, shirts for \$4.99 and tees for \$1.99 which makes it more affordable for growing kids... And with the campaign, shoppers could win the makeover prize too," says

cut, manicure/pedicure and photo shoot."

"I think kids would like it. It's an opportunity to come here and pick out things that you might not be able to afford," says Katherine, who liked the idea so much that she had Susie sign her up for it.

"I don't think I'll win," says Katherine, "But it's a fun thing to do!"

It's also important, says Pena, for an organization that helps so many, that could use some help itself. "The economy has affected Goodwill's business this year. Our donations are down about 11 percent compared to last year. The number of customers has increased by about 3 percent compared to last

an Abercrombie denim skirt for \$6.99 in excellent condition. That skirt probably retailed for 50 or 60 bucks.”

What might surprise you is that she’s discovering her deals at her local Goodwill Store near Lake Austin.

“I have friends who say, “No, you didn’t get that there,” says Cumings.

But she says they really shouldn’t be shocked.

“Austin’s a very disposable town,” says Cumings.” With disposable incomes come impulse purchases . They get home and find out it’s not going to work.”

It’s a phenomenon familiar to Cumings.

“Not only do I purchase here. I bring here.”

But today she’s not shopping for herself or donating. She’s taken the day off to help her boyfriend’s 14 year old niece, Katherine search for some back-to-school-bargains.

“I’m looking for back to school stuff, especially shirts and shorts,” says 9th grader Katherine Lerner. “I like to come shopping with Susie because she’s really good at finding bargains.”



This West Austin Goodwill and Goodwills all across town are taking part in a promotion called “Brand U” that offers the community a chance to win a shopping spree, makeover, haircolor and cut, manicure/pedicure, and photo shoot.

Goodwill Director of Marketing, Suzanha Pena about their three year old program called “ Brand U”,

“The idea,” says Gerner, “is that if you want to be an individual and have your own style, Goodwill is the place to shop. Basically you brand yourself with what you buy here.”

The ‘Brand U.’ campaign encourages shoppers that when it comes to style, ‘it’s not what you wear, but how you wear it’,” says Pena, “and through a partnership from Salon Keriz’ma and April Skinner, we were able to come up with two great prizes for a ‘Brand U.’ makeover, complete with shopping spree, hair color/

year. Also more people are seeking Goodwill’s employment services so the number of people in our community coming to Goodwill for help has increased by 20 percent.”

One thing that’s remained the same, says, Gerner, is their goal. “The whole reason we exist is to earn money to support all programs that help people with barriers to employment.”

So in the end Susie and Katherine don’t only walk out with bags full of bargains. They also leave knowing that in helping themselves, they’ve also helped some of their less fortunate neighbors.

For more information about Brand U and Goodwill log onto [www.austingoodwill.org](http://www.austingoodwill.org).