

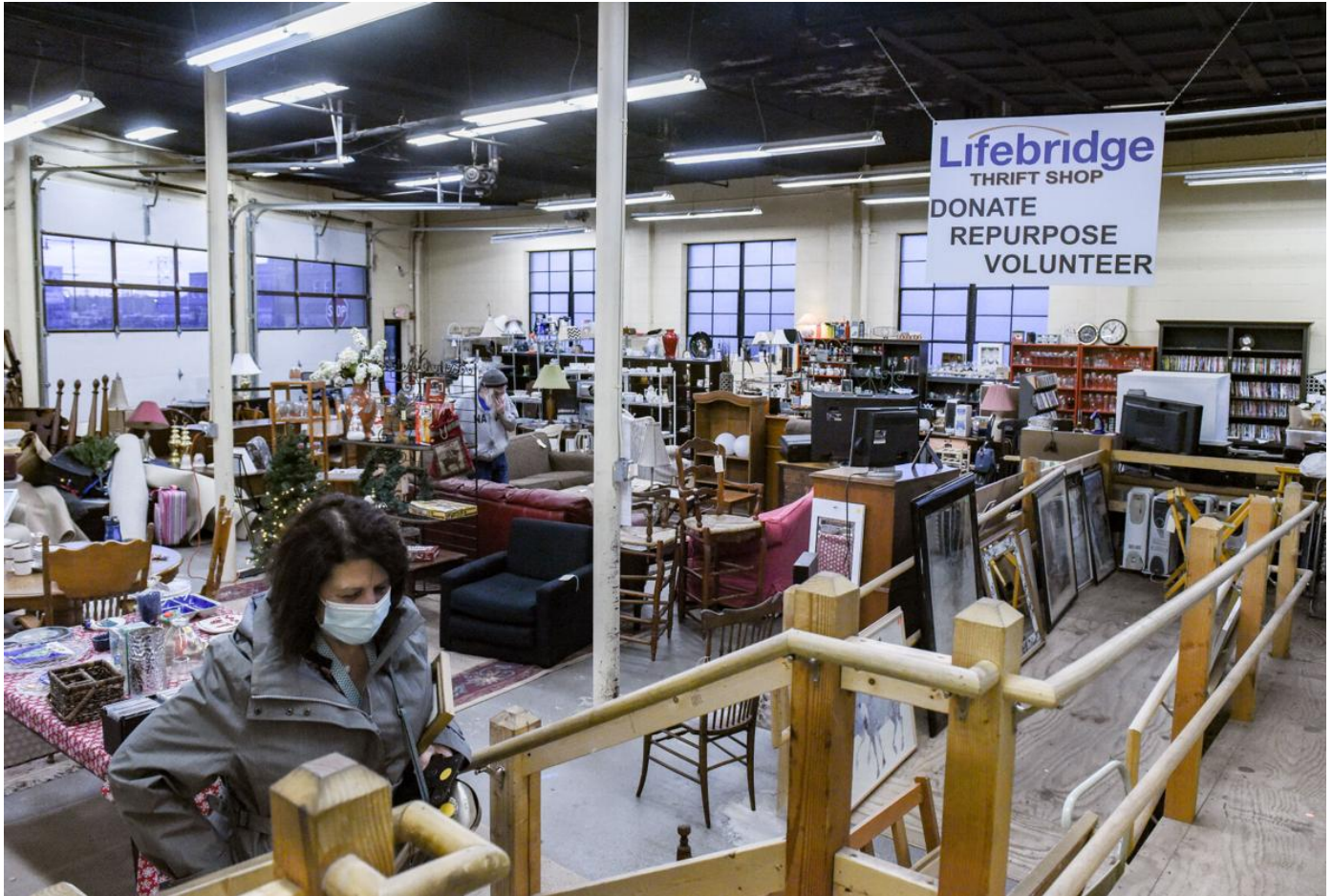


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FEATURED

Thrift stores seeing boom

By Dustin Luca | Staff Writer
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Lifebridge in Salem is seeing a boost in activity, not just shoppers, but also donations under the pandemic.

Jaime Campos



Thrift stores have celebrated a big resurgence amid the financial hardships created by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Throughout the region, thrift stores and second-hand retailers are reporting surges in both shoppers and donations. This is because of several factors tied to the ongoing pandemic and shifts in shopping

behavior at home.

“People are shopping differently,” said Ann L’Italien, manager of the Lifebridge thrift shop off Canal Street in Salem. “We were closed for three months when everybody shut down, and I didn’t know what it would look like when we opened. When we opened, obviously, we got a tidal wave — and it’s still coming in fast and furious for donations, which is wonderful.”

A number of factors helped lead to today’s spike in activity, according to Julie LaFontaine, executive director of The Open Door in Gloucester and its associated thrift shop Second Glance.

“As supply chains everywhere are slowed down and items people have ordered are waiting somewhere in a cargo container, you’re able to go to your local thrift store,” she said. “You’re able to walk in, you’re able to browse and find items that you were looking for, maybe something you weren’t looking for. and very often, by the nature of thrifting, you’re seeing items that remind you of a fairer time, a happier place. You might say, ‘My grandmother had one of these.’”

Furniture has become a major part of that, according to L’Italien. Many households, spending much more at home during the pandemic, have used the time to redecorate or do away with items they no longer need, while many other households came to rely on thrift stores even more, as not just their incomes but also manufactured goods were greatly impacted the past two years.

“The donations that are coming in are amazing. In the 16 years I’ve been with Lifebridge, I’ve never seen it like this day after day after day,” L’Italien said. “There’s been days I have had to shut down donations because our donation room gets so full, and we have to make sure we have a clear path.”

At Second Glance, “our furniture truck goes out and does pickups four days a week. Items come back, and we barely get them unloaded off the truck, and they’re out the door again,” LaFontaine said. “The National Association of Retail and Thrift Stores has identified second-hand furniture as one of the fastest growing areas of second-hand and resale in the industry.”

Some places have taken to social media to keep the energy going. Second Glance, for example, closes for a couple of days and refreshes its items on display to begin each week. That period ends Tuesday night with posts to social media showing new products, displays and more.

“When we open the door Wednesday morning, we often have a line of 50 people waiting to get in,” LaFontaine said. “We can see from our register, the point of sale, where anybody who shops with a credit card is coming from — and they’re coming from all over New England to shop on Wednesdays.”

L'Italien said she thought the surge was a one-time phenomenon, but "it hasn't slowed down."

"We were pushing almost a half-million dollars (in sales) before the pandemic," she said, and the store has cut back its hours now but is seeing probably double the number of customers.

Contact Dustin Luca at 978-338-2523 or DLuca@salemnews.com. Follow him at [facebook.com/dustinluca](https://www.facebook.com/dustinluca) or on Twitter [@DustinLucaSN](https://twitter.com/DustinLucaSN).

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Dustin Luca

Staff Writer