

What's Old Is What's Cool

Yesterday's jeans are today's big business.

ATLANTA, Ga. — It used to be that the only place to find a pair of "previously owned" — used — jeans was at the local Salvation Army, and that was only after digging through dusty bins or pawing through crowded racks.

Now, the used jean business has become big business, especially among the college crowd here.

"On an average Saturday we sell about 50 pairs of jeans," said Eddie Marion, owner of Clothing Warehouse, a vintage clothing store here.

The year-old Clothing Warehouse, which Marion owns with Jim Buckley, has two locations — one near Emory University and a second in downtown Atlanta. The 5,000-square-foot location near the university keeps over 700 pairs of jeans in stock, and a new shipment arrives every Friday.

"It's kind of become a big thing to be here when the new ones arrive," said Buckley. There's even a flashing sign outside that lets customers know when old jeans shipments are coming in.

After experimenting with various labels, the store now only stocks Levi's at the university location. Marion said Levi's are the only brand the students will buy, and customers will pay more for the button-fly styles. The Warehouse's owners have also found that while more women buy and wear used jeans, they want the men's fit, so the store only carries the men's cut. The jeans are priced between \$8 and \$14.

The downtown location also carries Lee, Calvin Klein and Wrangler.

While students are the number one customer for used jeans, Buckley said he's seeing all ages buy them.

"They buy them for three reasons: price, comfort and the look," Buckley noted he's also considering starting a business with overdyed used jeans.

It's a similar story in Athens, Ga. at Go Clothing, a 1,000-square-foot new and used clothing store near the University of Georgia campus. Owner Marc Wallace said that while students are the biggest customers, he also sells to construction workers, painters and laborers.

"They'll wear them until they are too dirty or worn out and then just come in and buy another pair," he said.

The eight-year-old store has also found that Levi's men's jeans are most in demand. Wallace tries to keep an average of 150 pairs in stock. He has a set price of \$14 a pair, which he's thinking of raising to \$16 because, he said, the jeans have become more scarce.

"The Japanese love them," Wallace said. "They have scouts here going to the same places I go, and they'll pay more. They sell them in Japan for \$70 and more."

One reason customers cited for buying used jeans at vintage shops rather than the Salvation Army or Goodwill Industries is that the stores wash the jeans and then merchandise them by size, taking some of the hassle out of finding the perfect pair.

Shoppers also said the "already-broken-in fit and feel" was the best thing about used jeans.

— ANITA J. FINKELSTEIN

The Last Word



Eddie Marion and Jim Buckley, owners of Clothing Warehouse.

Pamela Swergold, a 21-year-old student at Emory, claimed, "I'll pay up to \$25 if I love them. There's nothing better than a pair of old jeans."