

Nifty – dress in style for a buck

by Harry Stoll
Staff Writer

Nifty "As Is" is on the corner of Third and I streets, facing City Hall in downtown Antioch. A sign in the window states "All Clothing \$1."

"Yeah, right," responds the skeptic – expecting stuff too bad for Goodwill – expecting moth holes and stains, rips, ring around the collar, missing buttons, tears and cat hair – expecting worn cuffs – expecting anything but what's offered. Which is an array of clean and stylish clothing and shoes in top condition, for men, women and children.

A shopper takes a "look at me" woman's red jacket off the rack, holds it high by the hanger, turning it to check out its perfection, and in a voice barely above the aural threshold sings, "That's where my money goes, to buy my baby clothes..." The shopper reads the label:

Sak's 5th Avenue, all wool.

Nifty "As Is" occupies a prime spot at the top of Rivertown, is easy to get to, has plenty of parking and is run by the non-profit corporation Actively Living and Involved in a Variety of Endeavors (ALIVE) that "primarily serves adults over age 18 with physical impairments, developmental disabilities or sensory impairments..." This is a chance to help it help them while helping yourself to standout duds.

It's strictly cash, so stop at the money wall before you shop for all the really chic, hip, classy stuff with the branding. There are no marketing

tricks, no excluding of the good stuff with one of those "Does not include..." tag lines. All the known and unknown brands are \$1.

Talbot, Bill Blass, Laura Ashley.

Shopping sounds of sliding, clacking hangers resound in the room. Maria Romeo shops for her family here. Over one arm, she slings kid stuff and also three very sharp neckties. With her free arm she slides hangers, then tilts a jacket, making a V between two garments to get a good look in the stalking phase of shopping, then lifts it out, holds it up and goes for the kill. She adds it to the pile on her storage arm.

Eric McDaniel shops here for friends, grandchildren and poor people. "Whoever, whenever," he said. Today he is shopping for a man who lost his job. "This is a hot little store."

Catalina, one of the staff, is sorting and hanging up clothing for \$1 each with a million-dollar smile, and talking about the video games she likes to play.

Patrick James, J. Crew, Oleg Cassini.

Carmen Perez shops for shoes. "I'm trying to get rid of stuff at home," she said, but then pointed at a pair of classy sandals and marveled at what you could get for \$1, and said, "How could I pass these up?"

Shirts, pants, blouses, sweaters, zip-ups, pullovers, cargoes, field jackets, suits once worn by suits, polos, mohair, Henleys, camos, camel hair, leather, linen, bouclé, cotton, wool, jersey, fleece, cashmere, Crepe de Chine, denim, raime and the synthetic family: Polly, Esther, Rayon



Photos by Harry Stoll

Above, customers Carmen Perez and Mary Rocha look over their purchases before plunking down \$1 per article of clothing. Audrey Sysum, right, makes change at Nifty "As Is," a very nifty thrift store at Third and I streets in Rivertown.

and Orlando.

A shopper holds up a dinky jacket nipped at the waist then flared. "Umm, Tahari petite," said the shopper, then went on to pick out a



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hoodie with DIABLO across the chest and a sumptuous warmup jacket of heavy cotton with "Coronado Bay Resort, San Diego" on the left chest. This is a perfect place to get clothes with faraway names for grandchildren in pursuit of their identity.

A shopper sings sotto voce Streisand's tribute to Brice, "... Second Hand Rose," while holding up a dusty pink cashmere Crystal-Kobe cardigan, then sings the label to a Hoagy Carmichael tune, "Acrylic and Cotton - down in old Hong Kong."

Nautica, Macy's Club Room, Perry Ellis.

At the register, Manager Ofelia Chamberlain, a Latina who married the Chamberlain name, is calling out the purchases of Perez and her friend Nina Rocha. She holds up a dress, "Women's un dol-lar," holds up a shirt, "Men's un dol-lar," and at the register, in a wheelchair, Audrey Sysum rings up each item, announces the total, makes change and hands it to Perez.

The proceeds of the sale of this good stuff goes for field trips for those ALIVE serves, some of whom work in the store or attend nearby classes and learn how to prepare meals, plan menus and shop for groceries. Program Director Lynn Knaus said that transportation is one of their biggest expenses.

With your champagne purchases on your beer income, you will help them be transported.

Armani, Structure, Russell Athletic.

A shopper was all the way up to Elton John's "Crocodile Rock" and did a mondegreen of "Suzy wore her dresses tight," as he twirled a hanger holding a shimmering sheath of a dress by DKNY. Next, the shopper sang "Cocktails for Two." The voice was so low that only those at the same rack could hear, and they weren't certain they hadn't imagined it.



A shopper kept piling clothes onto the left arm, which was now loaded and hanging low like the shield of a weary warrior. A teal all-cotton Eddie Bauer with a military-style placket to button high for those nights in the ski lodge with the hot toddies and nice ladies - a Zegna sweater striped with many subdued colors under a raised pebbly black crisscrossing.

Gap, Brooks Brothers, Liz Claiborne.

Chris Bittle of Oakley is so enamored of the place, she brings her out-of-town visitors here to shop. Today, she is shopping for a man just in from Hawaii "who has no clothes."

Elegant Monette Rios, of the elegant abella mia high-end kids' stuff store on Second Street, has shopped here.

Nifty "As Is" also has some housewares. Sheets are 50 cents. Bittle said she buys pillows here for her dog and throws them away when he's done with them. A shelf holds some teapots short and stout. And there is glassware and some silver and such, but mostly it's the clothes.

This is a clean place with the southern sun shining in for your shopping pleasure. Get to Third and I and your trunk will runneth over.

Knaus said the shop takes donations, but only during business hours, which are Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.



Photos by Harry Stoll

Nifty "As Is" carries stylish jackets for - you guessed it - just a buck. Debbie and Catalina work there.