

# ACTing Out

After years of hardwork and determination the ACTS Thrift Store opens to the Pasadena community.

by Bruce Bruinsma



In the most difficult of economic times, a business has been planted and is beginning to blossom. It's an exciting one, for it joins two antithetical actions — buying for oneself and giving to someone else. As a six year old so clearly put it after visiting this business on opening day: "I love buying stuff at the ACTS Thrift Store and I love giving to the poor."

In 2003, Lake Avenue Community Foundation was starting to get it's bearings. But, as with all non-profits, the opportunities to serve were many and the resources were few. What was needed was the continuous infusion of cash that could be counted on to support the activities. But, where to find it?

While traveling the US visiting Rescue Missions of all kinds, their use of Thrift Store income to support ministry impressed LACF Board member Bruce Bruinsma. He spoke to other Board members and a flurry of hopeful investigation began. However, the premature collection of donated items became an albatross instead of an opportunity, and the process lost support. The idea was shelved, but not forgotten.

There was an occasional reference to the idea each time the annual budget was discussed, but nothing happened until early 2008 when Peter and Carol Schaller, active members of Lake Avenue, approached the Foundation with the idea of starting a small Thrift Store to support the Foundation. Peter and Bruce Bruinsma met over breakfast and realized that they shared a kindred spirit of using a business to fund ministry.

With their combined energy, a task force was formed to fully investigate the potentials and pitfalls of a Thrift Store. The task force, headed by Peter, with Carol firmly alongside, was composed of people bringing various gifts and a wide skill set to the task. Marketing, Accounting, Finance, Administration and Business Experience were represented in abundance. Bruce's wife Judy represented the entrepreneurial spirit necessary to keep the project moving during all the times when it looked too complicated, too expensive, too difficult and "too risky" to continue. Prayer and marketplace models from around the country provided the "certainty" that a thrift store could be successful.

The Task Force presented it's final results to the Board in May of 2009. Key findings were:

1. The store would have to be over 7000 square feet in order to be viable.
2. Location was critical
3. Professional management was a necessity
4. An ongoing source of quality donated goods was a prerequisite
5. Volunteers were a requirement

One more important item: \$250,000 in seed start-up funds would have to be raised.

The next step was to set up an implementation team tasked with:

1. Finding a location
  2. Raising the money
  3. Finding an experienced consultant/manager
  4. Developing a timeline for implementation
- It is depressing to be told "no" during any fund raising

venture. It was so encouraging to be told "yes" by 10 diverse contributors to the startup. Some of the contributors were not even connected to the growing LACF ministries impacting "At risk kids and their families" and the "homeless," the current key ministry areas of the Foundation. Three contributors were LACF Board members, a doctor, a retired stewardship professional, a long retired businessman, a Santa Barbara entrepreneur, a San Diego scientist, and a local real estate investor. God prepares people's hearts in strange and mysterious ways.

A 501(c) 3 non-profit corporation was formed under the name, ALL OUT CARING, Inc. The implementation team then visited the 3 Way Thrift store in Chino and hit the jackpot. Their manager, John Reyenga was supportive, open and helpful. He shared his operating information and recommended a consultant with great experience: Tony Reyes. The net result was that we saw the importance of larger scale, the critical importance of high quality and continuous donations, and the blessing of an experienced professional in the Thrift Store arena.

No one was very happy with the name, "All Out Caring Thrift Store". When Carol Schaller realized and shared what the initials were, we were unanimous in our response and united in our direction: ACTS Thrift Store it is!

We now had the money and so we negotiated the lease for the old Smart and Final store at Hill and Locust. The corporation was set up and we were ready to implement. The original Board, composed of Bruce Bruinsma, Mike Gray and Peter Schaller, was soon joined by Larry Stone and John Heck. To this group was added Tony Reyes, Judy Bruinsma, Dominique Franklin, Greg Helton, Jerry Nielsen and an expanding host of willing volunteers. The groundwork was set for 4 months of hard work, culminating in an exciting opening on July 17, 2010. Greg Waybright joined us for the ribbon cutting and the start-up became history. Now is the time for the continuing commitment to excellence and service that will be the ACTS Thrift Store priority for a long time to come.

This is the abbreviated story behind the dream and implementation of the ACTS Thrift Store: A need to further the ministry of the Lake Avenue Community Foundation led to a search for additional funding. The children, families and adults served by the Foundation had needs and the ministry needed to grow. A vision of what others had done that could be applied here was in place. God blessed us every step of the way. All to His glory.