

Transcript: The Hidden Value of Thrift Stores in Hospice Care

Chris Comeaux: 0:00

So, what's really your top line take on what's the impact of these thrift store operations?

Lin Sue Flood: 0:05

People know today that nonprofits are struggling. Um thankfully Hospice of the Valley is not, but they have a soft spot for nonprofits that do good in the community and they want to be a part of that. So, a social worker or a nurse who goes to visit a patient and sees that uh they have nothing. Their bed linens are threadbare, their pajamas have holes in them, they can't afford the shower chair, they can't afford the walker. They go to our white dove stores and they shop, and they're gifted with these things, these necessities that they would not otherwise have. It's community, it's touching lives, it's not retail. The volunteers feel fulfilled and are pouring out gratitude, and the cash register is putting pennies, because really, when you sell a blouse for three dollars, it's not a huge profit-making thing. However, we were able to put a little over two million toward hospice and valley programs last year.

Mark Cohen: 1:08

Think of the household where the breadwinner is on hospice and their children or grandchildren in the home. Someone from the hospice team in August, July, August or September is likely going to go to the thrift store and come back uh with a back-to-school wardrobe for each of the kids and a backpack filled with um supply school supplies. For-profits need to recognize that their not-for-profit competitor is generating that kind of patient and family goodwill.

Chris Comeaux: 1:37

One of my favorite pictures always of our purposes impacting each other is the pebble and the pond dropping in the concentric rings. Just listening to both of you. That to me is this visual that I get. Um, you push my thinking of something I thought I kind of understood. Um, so really appreciate you. And I think this show is gonna be a blessing to all our hospice and powered care listeners. I think it's gonna push their thinking as well and challenge all of them, maybe to up their game and just take it to even more levels. And I think it'll bless our communities where we're at.

Jeff Haffner / Intro: 2:04

And now our host, Chris Comeaux.

Chris Comeaux: 2:08

Hello, and welcome to TCNtalks. I'm excited today. We actually have two guests with us. We have Lin Sue Flood, who's the director of community engagement at Hospice of the Valley. Welcome, Lin Sue.

Lin Sue Flood: 2:18

Yeah, well, thank you for having me.

Chris Comeaux: 2:21

Absolutely. And then we have our longtime friend, haven't seen him in a while, Mark Cohen, who's the retired editor of Hospice News Today. Welcome, Mark. How are you doing?

Mark Cohen: 2:30

Hi, Chris. I'm doing great. Uh, having a lot of fun.

Chris Comeaux: 2:33

Man, I was telling you in the green room, like you're aging backwards. And so, I don't know if retirement is a secret sauce or something, but you're going the opposite way.

Mark Cohen: 2:42

It's semi-retirement. I'm still consulting on just not publishing a newsletter.

Chris Comeaux: 2:46

Well, said. Well, Mark, you get all the credit. So, you reached out to me, like, I've got a great idea for a show, and you had me within the first 10 minutes. And then we talked about who would be a great person to talk to about. Basically, well, the gist is gonna be thrift stores, but it's gonna be a lot deeper than that. And so, Lin Sue, you were one of the first people you brought up. And so you said I know the perfect person for the show. So, if you guys are good, we're gonna jump in in a second, but I would like you guys, especially you, Lin Sue, folks probably know Mark, although it's always good to ask him, what would our listeners want to know special about him? But what would you want our listeners to know about you, Lin Sue?

Lin Sue Flood: 3:23

That I came to Hospice of the Valley by happy accident. I was an NBC newscaster for 36 years. And 10 years ago, we had Hospice of the Valley care for my father-in-law, and I was hooked. Um, so I've been serving this mission for the last decade and love it so much.

Chris Comeaux: 3:46

That's incredible. Wow, you're the first newscast we've had in the podcast or former newscaster. So well, great, thank you. And you're with an incredible program. I'm sure you'll talk about that along the way. I'm a huge fan of your CEO, Deb Shumway, just one of the top CEOs in the hospice and powdered care space in the country. So, I'm sure you probably would say the same. Yes. Awesome. All right, Mark, what would you want our guests or our listeners to know about you?

Mark Cohen: 4:11

Well, I hung up uh my editor's hat uh almost two years ago now on Hospice News Today, but I'm still consulting actively with uh clients in the hospice field, uh working on communication strategies, marketing, public relations, things like that. So, I'm still very active. I'm just not getting up at four in the morning every day.

Chris Comeaux: 4:34

No, you're getting up at five in the morning. You're such a such a slacker. Part of the 5 a.m. club. Health healthcare, working in healthcare does that to you, getting up early. Absolutely. All right, Mark. Well, I'm gonna ask the first question to you again. You came to this idea to talk about thrift stores, and again, the first 10 minutes you started pushing my thinking. I I grew up at Four Seasons, they have an incredible thrift store, but you push my macro-based thinking of all the benefits. So I think hopefully our listeners are gonna already lean in and go, oh, well, they're talking about thrift stores. No, they're you're you're gonna be talking about thrift stores in a way maybe you've not heard someone talk about them before. And interestingly, Mark, you've competed against hospices that have had successful thrift operations, and you've worked as communications and a marketing consultant with hospices that operated just some really high-impact thrift stores. So, what's really your top line take on what's the impact of these thrift store operations?

Mark Cohen: 5:30

I think the top-line takeaway is that thrift stores are a largely undervalued asset, and they're undervalued both by not-for-profits and for-profits alike. For not-for-profits, they complement their community service and mission fulfillment by operating thrift stores. The stores often are viewed largely through the lens of operational expense and net revenue. Uh, hospices certainly talk about their stores as vital to supporting their not-for-profit mission, and they acknowledge the under-the-radar role that stores play in the hospice's grief and bereavement work, that every donation from a hospice family comes with a story, and that the donation of a loved one's cherished possessions often is one of the first steps in a survivor's grief journey. But not-for-profits, I believe, not-for-profits don't talk enough and proudly enough about how their thrift operation enhances their overall brand. The physical stores, their delivery trucks, the word of mouth from satisfied shoppers and donors could be worth millions in brand advertising and marketing in a

large market and even hundreds of thousands in a mid-sized market. Economically, hospice thrift stores provide good-paying retail jobs with excellent benefits for the retail field. In areas where thrift stores and antique stores attract a significant segment of the local tourist trade, hospice thrift shops tend to be on the top of the must-visit list for many out-of-market antiquers, collectors, and treasure hunters. Hospice thrifts are most often located in strip malls, not necessarily always the greatest or newest or flashiest strip malls. And the traffic they generate can benefit significantly all the nearby businesses to that strip mall and in that strip mall. Another economic aspect is that eBay resellers are among the most frequent shoppers at hospice thrift stores, scooping up treasures they find to stock their own online selling. And there's also the environmental impact. Hospice thrift stores keep tons of goods out of local landfills, furniture, certain types of electronics, housewares, clothing, and more. It's often hobbyists and crafters who purchase these gently used items and refurbish them to give them a second life. From the point of view of the for-profits, I simply think that most of them don't appreciate the totality of the impact a credible thrift store operation can have on the reach, sustainability, market presence, and overall success of a not-for-profit provider. I think Lin Sue certainly can share her perspective on all that from what she sees every day in the highly competitive greater Phoenix market.

Chris Comeaux: 8:25

Yeah, we're gonna have her go there in just a second. I just want to make a couple comments, Mark. It's so neat that our um TCN corporate office now is in downtown Hendersonville, North Carolina, right outside of Asheville, North Carolina. So I look on Main Street, and that's actually where Four Seasons Hospice Home Store, they have many other locations, but that was kind of their initial. And so, I get to literally kind of look out my window and see it down there. And I when you called me and started talking about this uh this the idea of this show, again, you push my thinking. And whenever our kids were younger, when I was the CEO of Four Seasons, we used to close the store on Friday nights as a family project. So, our kids were running the cash register. It was cool, it was a cool family outing. It taught them some great life skills, etc. But you know, sometimes you're too close to something. And the thing that you just hit me with, and my wife goes shopping at the home store quite frequently, and I actually shared with her because we were walking through, said, do you think that everything there as we're walking through here, there's a story behind this? There's a story for someone's life. And um, I tell you what, my I went up and my wife stocked there, Mark. She's like, You're so sentimental. I've never thought about that before. It's just and like, but it's so true. And I guess I just never made that connection that you're literally walking through people's stories as you're walking through that store. And the other thing that you had mentioned to me is just the um the fellowship that we create of those volunteers. Like they have their own little ecosystem. And I've just been so more keenly aware now, walking through that store of

seeing those things that you're actually pointing out. So, well, Lindsay, let's not uh hold you off any longer. I'd love to hear you talk about. So, hospice of the valley. I think your stores are called the White Dove Stores. So, can you just talk about that?

Lin Sue Flood: 10:13

So we have four of them, and they're the White Dove thrift stores because our logo is kind of a combination of a hand open and a dove. It looks like a dove hand. So they are our white dove thrift stores, they're geographically scattered, and they were started in about 2005. We've been around since 1977, because after decades of people saying, we had such beautiful care, my mom has passed, she has a grand piano, she has this amazing antique dining set, she has all of this stuff, and we want it to go to a good charity. And you're a nonprofit, you care for all. Can I just donate it to you? So, thrift store idea was born, and we get the most beautiful items, all of them, as you said, with a beautiful story behind them, and they get repurposed in other people's lives and build another story.

Chris Comeaux: 11:09

Wow. Well, how do you guys talk about it? Like how is your messaging? Um, is it that it's much more than a high-end thrift store? So how do you message it into your community?

Lin Sue Flood: 11:20

So, we never message it as being um high-end, although we do have designer things because we never know what's going to come in the door. We have very unusual things, you know, 10-foot nutcrackers at Christmas that you would expect to be outside in neiman Marcus. People have amazing things that they don't need anymore, and they're going to part with them. And we're so honored when they give them to us. Our messaging is your shopping, your volunteering, your donations support hospice of the valley, patients and families in need. That is the signage. Those are the that's what's on the t-shirts of the volunteers who work. It's all about we emphasize the mission. Everything about our stores is mission-oriented. It's really not retail.

Chris Comeaux: 12:09

That's really good. You know, recently we had um Rebecca Ramsay and uh who's got a great program up in Oregon, and we had Mark Jarman-Howe with her. And Mark is the CEO of a hospice of St. Helena in the UK. And it was such a great pairing. And the interesting thing about Mark's program, so in the UK, their version of Medicare only reimburses 25% of the actual cost of the hospice. So, they have to do all these other supplemental businesses just to make their budget work. So, there's a lot more necessity upon them as compared to maybe us in the US. And of course, they do have thrift stores as well. But the interesting thing that blew me away, their most profitable business is actually office cleaning service. And this is the punchline of why I'm sharing it with you

guys. People will choose their office cleaning service because they feel like it's a societal impact. Yes, I need my office clean, but I'm actually impacting the greater society, culture, the local community by that purchase. And it just hit me like our thrift stores, we could do such a better job of connecting it back to purpose, perhaps. So, Mark, maybe that's a good segue to me asking you where do you think a lot of these hospice stores could do a better job promoting the overall value proposition and maybe also connecting it to more purpose in their purchases? Yeah.

Mark Cohen: 13:30

Um, well, I want to start by um referring to your comment about uh with your wife that every item in a thrift store, uh, the Four Season thrift store has a story. You know, we um we tell people that the quickest, best way to get a sense for the heart of hospice is to, you know, go with a clinician and do one bedside visit. And once you've done that, you're hooked. Well, I would tell you that equally impactful would be to stand at the donation door of a hospice thrift shop and just watch one or two of those transactions where somebody comes up and opens up their trunk and they take out every item individually, and they have to tell the volunteer or the staff person, accepting that, what every item meant to them. And the volunteer and the staff person will convey back that they will treat all of these items with dignity and respect uh and appreciation. And I think that is um uh a good foundation for the value, um for the value proposition. But in terms of um messaging about the value proposition, you know, uh from a broader perspective, I recommend actually when you're talking to the community to start with the economic impact story, because people don't think there's realize what a kind of an economic impact there is. How much retail space does a hospice lease? How much traffic does the hospice thrift store generate in each neighborhood in which it has a retail presence? How many staff does the hospice employ? How does the competition, uh, how does your um compensation stack up against competing uh thrift stores and dollar stores and even Walmart? What kind of benefits do you provide? You know, we see so many stories about retail workers having little or no benefits, having to be on Medicaid while they get a paycheck from a retailer. Uh, most of the hospices with the with which I'm familiar offer their retail employees the same generous health and other benefits as the clinical staff receive. How do the stores support the local eBay reseller community? You know, there's so many people nowadays who generate all or at least most of their income from eBay sales, and the hospice thrift stores are incredibly important to their ability to gather inventory for sale. Uh, does a hospice thrift store attract large numbers of tourists uh who've come to the area in search of hidden treasures, antiques, and collectibles? Um, are your thrift stores part of the local tourist economy? Uh in some markets, there are tour bus operators that offer day tours of thrift shops, and uh there almost always is a hospice thrift shop um on that uh full day route uh for those tour bus operators. Uh and then I talk about the environmental impact. Now, how many tons, literally, how many tons of goods

does your thrift shop keep out of local landfills? You know, particularly large items like furniture. Um few hospices, thrift uh, few hospice thrifts recycle electronic equipment, but those that do have a even greater story to tell. One hospice I'm familiar with takes just about every kind of electronic, no matter how old, no matter how beat up, they fix and sell what they can. But what they can't fix or sell, they strip for parts and metals and they sell that. Uh, and their electronic recycling program alone brings in a net profit of about \$100,000 a year. Uh just keep in mind that the best hospice marketing tells a story. So, with regard to thrifts, be sure to tell the story, the complete story uh of what your hospice thrift operation does.

Chris Comeaux: 17:30

That's so good, Mark. I mean, there's so many pearls in what you said. One of the ones I hadn't considered before, but now I can look back, maybe that's what I was after. You know, we'll pay a lot of dollars to do a customer focused group to understand how we're impacting the community, et cetera. You could go actually stand and where you're actually getting those donations and have kind of a customer focused group, like real time. I never thought about that before. And it is a beautiful way to actually do that. That's again so many pearls on what you said. Well, Lin Sue, um, there's been just a lot of media coverage, especially post-pandemic, of millennials, Gen Z, and I think also now we're calling it Generation Alpha, and how like they're loving thrifting. And so, how do you think hospices could communicate to their community mission, the mission of their organization to this younger generation of shoppers? So, do hospices need to communicate that mission to this younger generation? And can they or you? What do you see others doing, et cetera?

Lin Sue Flood: 18:28

Oh, I think the younger generation definitely wants to have a social impact. That's super important to them. So, we invite youth groups, um, schools and charter schools and volunteer groups like National Charity League to come into our stores and volunteer and interact with customers. They do their service days there uh and they shop there. They all love vintage. Um, they find cool, one-of-a-kind things. There's only one pair of hot green neon go-go boots, right? And so-and-so got them, and no one else can have them. It is um so fun for them because it's an adventure. They like the idea of repurposing and giving something new life, and they really like the idea of helping to support someone with terminal illness who otherwise would not have hospice care at the end of their life because they don't have insurance, and they don't have the means to pay for that care. So that means a lot to them. There is an atmosphere because most of the people in our stores are volunteers. We have 450 volunteers across four stores, a handful of staff. They're there because they want to be. They're there because they're so grateful that people are supporting our charity care programs for people who really have nowhere else

to turn. And people know today that nonprofits are struggling. Um, thankfully, Hospice of the Valley is not, but they have a soft spot for nonprofits that do good in the community, and they want to be a part of that. And they also see that there's a lot of stuff going on underneath. So, a social worker or a nurse who goes to visit a patient and sees that uh they have nothing. Their bed linens are threadbare, their pajamas have holes in them, they can't afford the shower chair, they can't afford the locker. They go to our white dev stores and they shop. And they're gifted with these things, these necessities that they would not otherwise have. So, the stores do a lot of things um other than just sell stuff. They build community. All of those volunteers, yes, we have young ones, but we have a lot of retirees, and their Tuesday shift and their Friday shift with their buddies and their thrift store family is the highlight of their week. And they have their favorite customers who come in and they know that Betty loves this pattern of China. And guess what, Betty? It came in and it's in this corner. And I don't know if you have these pieces but come on over here and look at these and come back Monday because they're 50% off because it's senior day. Um, it's community, its touching lives, it's not retail.

Chris Comeaux: 21:19

That's so good. You're actually reminding me, Lin Sue, that um earlier this year, Four Seasons asked me, and I agreed, I've reluctantly agreed and ended up just loving it. They had a resale runway, so like a fashion show, and all the all the clothes had to come from the thrift store. So, I was one of the models. Obviously, they're scraping the bottle of the barrel, the bottom of the barrel, but I had such a great time with that. And interestingly, my son who now works for that organization was there as well. Um, a lot of multi-generations, a lot of great donors of their program. It was just such a fun day, but it just reminded me of what you were talking about. There is such a fellowship and a community that occurs not only the people that are coming in, but obviously all the people around the store.

Lin Sue Flood: 22:00

So, Chris and Mark, do you like my outfit? This is a designer Bustenberg that I got at our thrift store.

Chris Comeaux: 22:06

Oh my gosh. That's amazing. It is awesome. Well, there you go.

Lin Sue Flood: 22:10

You never know the treasures. You never know what you're gonna find.

Chris Comeaux: 22:14

Yeah, actually, it's funny you say that. I was actually traveling last week, and the blazer that I got being a model for them, I wore it last week, and it's the first time I actually wore it since I was on that resale runway. And it's a really great kind of um, it's actually a uh Lands End blazer, which is not something I would go and purchase for myself, but it was actually pretty cool.

Mark Cohen: 22:34

So um uh Lin Sue was talking about uh younger generation and looking for vintage fashion. You know, another trend that is a little newer than um teens and uh women in their teens and twenties going to um thrift stores to look for vintage fashion is guys in that age range going to thrift stores looking for graphic tees. You know, uh a t-shirt with cartoon character on it, or a sports team on it, or a tourist destination, an old band, uh, you know, uh an Allman Brothers uh concert tour t-shirt from 1975, um, and also retro footwear, retro sneakers. So, you know, it's not just um it's not limited to the female gender. You have um uh high school and college age guys who are going looking for their treasures uh as well. It's really interesting.

Dragonfly Health Ad: 23:35

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Chris Comeaux: 24:20

Wow, you're getting you're just a treasure market. There's so much, I learned so much every time around you. Like there's a whole world of depth here around thrift stores I never would have known, which again is why we're doing this. So, Lin Sue, there's some unique things in your market that Mark was pointing out when we were talking about who would be a great guest. So, Phoenix, Maricopa County, you have you guys have some of the highest concentration of hospice providers. You guys are the sole nonprofit provider, which is why we love you guys. You're in a very unique market and you stand head and shoulders above those guys. So, you face a whole lot of competitors. Um and so do you think that your toughest for-profit competitors, do they really appreciate maybe the contribution to the community of the White Dove stores and maybe how you elevate the whole um just community awareness of the importance of hospice services?

Lin Sue Flood: 25:13

Well, if I had to guess, I would say, Chris, they probably shot there. Because they probably went in to check it out because wouldn't you check out something that wonderful your competitor was doing? And they probably found a treasure and they probably saw the compassion that was on display, they saw the pride of the workforce, they saw the joy of the shoppers, um, and they saw the connection to mission in the signage and just the way people talked about things, or they'll pick something up and go, my dad used to have these crazy wingtips, and I didn't even know these were around anymore. And these are in pretty good shape, and hey, they're my son's size. That kind of stuff happens all the time. And I think if you were a competitor and you walked in, you wouldn't be hit with, oh my gosh, this is Macy's on sale day. You would be hit with, wow, this is our community. And it's a win-win. They're finding things they love. The volunteers feel fulfilled and are pouring out gratitude. And the cash register is putting pennies because really, when you sell a blouse for \$3, it's not a huge profit-making thing. However, we were able to put over a little over two million toward hospice and valley programs last year. But that every Cha-ching and every thank you for shopping here, and every, oh, this has a blue dot on it, you get it for 50% off. All of that stuff makes everyone happy and it does good in the community. So, I think the competition cannot be blind to that, um, because it isn't just shopping and getting a good deal.

Chris Comeaux: 27:02

That's so good. One of my favorite quotes is rising tide raises all boats. I got to imagine, because you guys have not all your competition is good competition because of just the proliferation. Some people are getting into the business. You're not saying that. I'm saying that. Um, they're not all getting in the business for the right reason. So, I got to think that you're elevating what this is all about and human nature is human nature. I think that should challenge people at a good level that this key, this care is so impactful for the community. Maybe we should go back and do a better job. So, I would go out on a limb and say you really are elevating it in beautiful ways. Um, so Mark, I'm curious what you might have to say about this. What do you think the risks are for those other for-profit providers that might just go, yeah, those nonprofits there, they're just, you know, they're diluting their focus because they're doing these thrift stores. Yeah, I think it's tough for some of them to get their hands around it.

Mark Cohen: 27:55

I'd like to begin the answer by talking about something I saw not too long ago when I was uh with a client that I was consulting with on communications, and I was in one of their largest thrift store, and there was one of their sales reps who works in the assisted living community locally, who was getting ready to host a the bus that was coming from one of the large assisted living communities in the community. They're gonna bring 10, 12 residents to the store for special shopping event, extra discount. Um, there'd be a little

cake and and iced tea and lemonade for them and whatnot. And I just say, you know, you know, you can't compete with that um if you're for-profit. And it really builds a tremendous amount of goodwill and awareness. It gives an identity to the sales rep who goes into that assisted living community once or twice a week, um, builds brand awareness. And yeah, it's tough. And I think my general advice for for-profits begins with the sales reps. Um for-profits should understand that um uh the market imp uh how the market impact of a not-for-profit hospices thrift shop frustrates the daily life of many sales reps. Uh the daily advertising that results from the thrift shop retail signage, their delivery trucks, uh, it's just a huge billboard advertising campaign that costs the hospice absolutely nothing. Uh, and hospice reps tend to get frustrated when the other guy has more advertising and greater top-of-mind market presence. So the bottom line for hospice is support your reps um, because if they are aware of what's going on, they're going to get frustrated. Um, understand also, and this uh um builds on a point that uh Lin Su made, understand that for low income and underserved families, there can be a genuine benefit um in receiving services. From a not-for-profit hospice that has a thrift store operation. Lin Sue talked about team members going and replacing the linens on the bed for a low-income family that can't afford new linens. You know, think of the family in a home without air conditioning and their electric fan dies. Someone from the hospice team will go to the thrift store and pick up a fan. Think of the patient who has lost so much weight over the course of her illness that none of her clothes fit. And the family can't afford to buy new clothes. Someone from the hospice team likely will go to the thrift store and pick up some pajamas, a robe, and a few outfits in the right size so that the patient can feel dignified, can feel that they're not just trapped in a hospital bed. Think of the household where the breadwinner is on hospice and there are children or grandchildren in the home. Someone from the hospice team in August, July, August, or September is likely going to go to the thrift store and come back with a back-to-school wardrobe for each of the kids and a backpack filled with school supplies. For-profits need to recognize that their not-for-profit competitor is generating that kind of patient and family goodwill hundreds of times over every day.

Chris Comeaux: 31:30

His company is called No BS Marketing, except the BS is actually uh spoken out. Um and it just really got me thinking about the challenge of marketing. And so, the more diverse your service offering, the harder it is to really nail your marketing that paints the picture. And the more you keep talking, I think this is the challenge, and maybe our opportunity as we go forward for a lot of thrift store operations is how do you market this in such a way that paints the picture of all these beautiful things, all the impacts? You probably can't do that just in the logo, but even once you walk into the store, um for seasons does come to mind, they've attempted some of what I'm poking on. Like when you walk to the store, they use the top um space close to the ceiling to tell stories. And so, I'm thinking

listening to you more of this community impact, the ways that we impact the broader community. So, when people are shopping, they realize that they're residing in a much bigger story. Every item on the shelf, um, this whole interaction with each other, the volunteers that are there. And so, this feels like maybe a little bit of uh an opportunity for us as we go forward. How do you do just a better job with that? And I think even how we brand some of our facilities, um, because quite often is just typically called like the hospice store or the hospice thrift store. And as we talk about it, it's so much richer than that. Although I've seen some hospices start to get innovative, um like treasures and just different words they've been using to kind of build off of that. So maybe that's a good segue. Um, what do you guys each think? Like, what's the future of hospice thrift store operations? So, Lin Sue, maybe you go first and then Mark, if you want to close this out.

Lin Sue Flood: 33:08

So, I would say that the focus always has to be on mission. We have during uh hospice and palliative care month, we pass out these paper doves at the counter and people write their loved ones' names on them, and we fill a whole wall with that. So, when you walk in as a shopper, you know that um Tom's mom or whatever, there's a bird up there that reminds them of why they shop there. People drive from very far away to come to one of our white dove stores over another thrift store. It's not because the merchandise is going to be that much better. It's because they're going to be embraced by volunteers who are so thrilled they're shopping to help care for people who wouldn't have it otherwise. So, the mission in the care always has to be, I think, top of mind. It has to be the reason you're doing it. And then you don't have to worry about, oh my gosh, are we going to get enough people in for our Christmas for July sale? Um, if you're catering to teachers and veterans and you try to make them feel special with different um sales throughout the year, those are just icing on the cake. The day in and day out marketing, focusing on care and mission is what brings people in the door every single day, not just on sale day. And the value of that to steal someone else's marketing word slogan is priceless. It truly is priceless.

Mark Cohen: 34:39

That's so good. Thank you, Mark. Well, I agree. Mission, uh mission fulfillment has to be the foundation on which everything that you build on the potential messaging impact of the hospice thrift stores. That's gotta be that's the that's the foundation mission. Um and in terms of the future, as Lin Sue has mentioned, thrifting is hot right now. Um, as she said, teens and young adults have embraced thrifting, partly out of a love for vintage fashion, graphic tees, costume jewelry, partly out of a desire to get a better value than they can get by going to a dying mall or by going online. Um I remember recently walking into a hospice thrift store in a suburban area uh with lots of teen and college shoppers and seeing a 20-foot-long rack of women's jeans, all priced at \$5.99 each. Um and I was

actually, I told the store manager, I said, I'm actually surprised that at that price there's anything on the rack right now, uh, because it was right after uh back to school had started. Um and it's important to keep in mind that um uh I hate to be morbid here, but as the boomers age, as boomers like me age, keep in mind that we were the first generation known for our acquisitiveness. We simply had more stuff than any previous generation. So, as boomers like me age and eventually die, a lot of our stuff will end up at hospice thrift stores.

Chris Comeaux: 36:11

That's interesting, Mark. And the other thing I was thinking about too, you're also the first generation that's the non-pension generation, so a lot of 401ks. And so the um disparity is quite a bit. I mean, you you're you've been incredibly successful. And so maybe also thrift stores might be critical for them just to be able to get the things that they need as we go forward as well. Sure. Absolutely. Well, well, I really want to thank both of you. Let me give you both the opportunity just for any final thoughts, and then I'll close us out. Lin Sue, any final thoughts?

Lin Sue Flood: 36:41

Well, so I think it's beautiful that you've shown a light on this because I don't think a lot of people really do appreciate it. I know that in your own community, people understand what it means. Uh, it wasn't that long ago that I got a phone call out of the blue from an artist who is a muralist. And she said, I, you took beautiful care of my dad, and I want your store, the front of it to be pretty. It's just great concrete now. Can I do a gigantic mural on the front wall? And we were so honored, and it is eye-catching and gorgeous, and there's a story there. So, really, it is a bunch of stories about community, a bunch of stories about touching lives and the lives that these objects have lived and will go on to live. Maybe you're gonna pass that Lanz and blazer down to your son someday. I mean, you don't know. Um, it's just uh lovely to see people supporting something good and then getting something good from it. Um, the feeling and then the item as well.

Chris Comeaux: 37:47

That's so beautifully said. I've people aren't, they don't love this as much as I do, but I picture our thrift stores often as this beautiful circle of love. Um, because it really is. It comes back, and there might be a better way to say it. Lin Sue, if you will provide a picture, I would love to include that picture of that mural in our show notes because I think that'd be. Perfect. Thank you. Mark, final thoughts.

Mark Cohen: 38:09

My recommendation to hospices that run thrift stores is make sure you're looking over the rim of your silo and that you're looking at your thrift stores more than just dollars and

cents and FTE and how much we can return and look at the bottom line and get together occasionally, you know, quarterly with your staff and with your volunteers, listen to their stories and think about all the ways that you uh that you impact the community. One of my clients, uh every one of their thrift stores, they take the linens that can't be resold because they're soiled, and they keep them in a corner. And once a week, once a month, the local animal shelter comes by and picks up the towels and the blankets and the pillows um so that they have bedding for the uh abandoned and injured animals they have. And, you know, stories like that, um, just grab people. And um, if you're not looking beyond the dollars and cents, you won't hear and see those stories, and they're important to tell.

Lin Sue Flood: 39:17

Chris, just this morning I have an email from one of our nurses, and she sent me a picture so we could share it in our staff newsletter. And it's her sitting on the bed with one of our patients who um is in her 80s and it's pretty much a shut-in, but she loves to read, and she can't afford books. And there was a stack of books this high on the bed, and she brings them, and when she's done, she takes them back to the white dove. Somebody else will buy them, and she brings her a bunch more to read. It's just beautiful.

Chris Comeaux: 39:46

Yeah. That's totally beautiful. Well, uh one of my favorite pictures always of our purposes impacting each other is the pebble and the pond dropping in the concentric rings, just listening to both of you. That to me is this visual that I get. And Mark, kudos to you. Um, you pushed my thinking of something I thought I kind of understood. Um, so really appreciate you. And I think this show is going to be a blessing to all our hospice and palliative care listeners. I think it's gonna push their thinking as well and challenge all of them maybe to up their game and how they take this beautiful place. And maybe we do a better job of helping everyone understand this is uh a very impactful for the community, the staff, patients, families we serve, and just take it to even more levels. And I think it'll bless our communities where we're at. So thank you to both, both of you. Appreciate you.

Mark Cohen: 40:32

Welcome.

Lin Sue Flood: 40:33

Thank you.

Chris Comeaux: 40:34

Well, to our listeners, we always appreciate you. Please make sure you subscribe, pay this podcast forward, especially a lot of your uh peers and co-workers on this one, pay it

forward. I think it's gonna make all of us smile because many of you are listeners that are um doing the hospice and palliative care work by the bedside. And so realizing that your love on a patient and family, and then they give everything that they have to the thrift store, and then it goes on and on and on, not only blessing your organization financially, but maybe the people who buy it and they realize the story that they inherited from these goods. It's just such a beautiful circle. So, pay it forward. Um, as we always do. Actually, Lin Sue picked out actually both of these quotes. So, I'm gonna read both of them because they're both so good. To close today's show, it always makes you think a little bit more about what we talked about. "Whoever said that money can't buy happiness simply didn't know where to go shopping." It is attributed to various people, one of which is actually Bo Derek. This other one is "I love older things that people have used and cherished. They have personality, character, and soul," and that's by Anna Hilleglass. Thanks for listening to TCNtalks.