

# Enter the world of the Goodwill Outlet bins, where some Utahns are feeding the ultimate side hustle

To turn secondhand clothes into cash, resellers first have to face the chaos.



(Rick Egan | The Salt Lake Tribune) Nick Marsh searches through the bins of new merchandise at Goodwill Outlet on Wednesday, May 12, 2021.

By Kolbie Peterson

| June 3, 2021, 6:00 a.m.

| Updated: 8:03 a.m.

**Editor's note** • *This story is available to Tribune subscribers only. Thank you for supporting local journalism.*

It's a Wednesday morning at Goodwill Outlet in Salt Lake City, and the mood is tense.

No one takes their eyes off the large blue bins that workers are wheeling out and lining up in tidy blocks, their contents a deliberate mystery underneath mismatched sheets and blankets.

Standing in a row behind a line of orange cones, the shoppers seem to hold their breath. When a manager gives the group a quick thumbs-up, they rush forward and fall upon the bins.

People yank off the coverings and sort through the jumble of donated shirts, sweaters, jackets and denim with experienced efficiency, not even pausing to hold up the items and examine them.

They grab whatever they can reach, some deciding to put an item into their bag after briefly rubbing the fabric between their fingers. Clothes are picked up and dropped so fast they become almost a blur. One manager compares it to watching popcorn pop.



(Rick Egan | The Salt Lake Tribune) Sifting through the bins of clothing at the Goodwill outlet on Wednesday, May 12, 2021.

Goodwill Outlet — the only Goodwill outlet store in Utah, Montana and southern Idaho, a region run by Easterseals-Goodwill Northern Rocky Mountain Inc. — can be an affordable place to refresh a wardrobe. But its combination of by-the-pound pricing and largely unsorted merchandise also presents a chance to turn those heaping bins into heaps of cash.

Most current, mass-produced clothing isn't worth much at all. But savvy “resellers” with the knowledge (and reflexes) to snatch up vintage clothes, or items made by top brands like Vans, Lucky, Fossil, Reformation, Converse, True Religion, Frye, Patagonia or Coach, can make a killing.

For bin divers looking to profit from their finds, the outlet has become the epicenter of Utah's clothing resale scene: always frenzied, sometimes gracious and occasionally cutthroat.



(Rick Egan | The Salt Lake Tribune) Bins with fresh merchandise await their time on the sales floor with blankets over the top, at Goodwill Outlet, on Wednesday, May 12, 2021.

### **‘It’s a rush every day’**

Whatever items aren’t sold in Easterseals-Goodwill’s 21 stores after a couple of weeks get shipped to the Utah outlet, located at 1850 W. 1500 South, in an industrial area along Redwood Road.

And it’s a whole lot of stuff. Unlike regular Goodwill stores, at the outlet, everything is piled high in bins: books, “hardgoods” (like belts and shoes) and, most precious of all, clothing. Each one of those bins (the official term is “boat”) has between 130 and 200 pounds of goods inside, according to Jason Asher, assistant vice president of retail product and logistics for Easterseals-Goodwill.

Once shoppers have picked over a section of bins, workers whisk them away, swapping them for a new batch standing at the ready in the back. And the dance begins again.

With about 80 bins out at one time, and the whole configuration getting rotated a few times a day, that adds up to 38,000 pounds of merchandise moving through the outlet between opening and closing.

“It’s a rush every day,” said Nick Marsh, 33, who waits with his wife, Celiana, as thrift store employees prepare for yet another “rotation.”

For some, reselling is just a side hustle. Others, like the Marshes, have turned their venture into “a full-time gig,” he said.

The couple have run a store on eBay.com called [Ghost Mountain](#) since 2017, stocking it with clothing, shoes and “anything that sells,” Marsh said. He and Celiana, 28, find items to sell at yard sales and thrift stores, but they’re regulars at Goodwill Outlet. They visit a few times a week, usually staying for hours.

According to the math, it’s time well spent. At Goodwill Outlet, with items sold by the pound at drastically reduced prices, shoppers get more value the more they throw into their cart. For example, according to the [store’s current pricing structure](#), a haul of clothing that weighs 100 pounds will cost the least per pound: \$1.09, or \$109 total before sales tax.

What does 100 pounds of clothing look like? A medium-weight men’s T-shirt weighs 5 ounces, which means 100 pounds of T-shirts would be a whopping 320 shirts. That shakes out to just 34 cents per shirt. If one of those shirts happens to be a vintage band tour shirt, it could sell for about \$40 (if it’s from [Matchbox Twenty’s 2001 “Mad Season” tour](#)) on the lower end, and almost \$200 (if it’s from [Fleetwood Mac’s 1986 “Rock a Little” tour](#)) on the higher end.



(Rick Egan | The Salt Lake Tribune) Ana Montes, recycling and product transportation manager for Easterseals-Goodwill, talks about the flow of clothing and other donations at Goodwill Outlet, on Wednesday, May 12, 2021.

### **Diving into the bins**

The Goodwill Outlet shopping experience is “not for everybody,” said Ana Montes, recycling and product transportation manager for Easterseals-Goodwill. She has worked at the Utah outlet since it opened in 2018.

Asher agreed, saying that because the outlet shopping system “was so new” to Utahns back then, people were more “aggressive in their shopping.”

One confrontation still stands out to him. Since the majority of customers shopping at Goodwill Outlet are resellers trying to stock their online stores, the competition can be fierce, Asher said. And before employees started

covering the bins as they rolled them out, eager shoppers would take advantage of that time to eyeball each item inside.

On that particular day, a number of shoppers had been eyeing the same turn-of-the-century trade blanket — made from wool and worth a hefty \$300 — while waiting for the signal for shopping to begin. The moment it did, they all “bolted” for the blanket, and two people ended up in a “quick tugging match” after diving into the bin itself.

To resolve the situation, the store determined that no one would be allowed to buy the blanket. (The shopper who managed to yank the item away from the other person “was very upset,” Asher said.)

Since then, management has put up large placards discouraging pushing and shoving. Shoppers are reminded to be respectful of others, and all bins now remain covered until shopping is allowed to begin. These changes have reduced the number of “incidents” between shoppers, but digging through the bins can still get competitive.

In April, a person posted a Google review online for Goodwill Outlet in Salt Lake City, alleging her experience there left her “anxious, unsafe, and disregarded.” She said a book reseller grabbed books out of her hands, then shoved her. She ends her review by saying, “Future shoppers, beware.”

When asked about that episode, Asher acknowledged the incident and stressed that the outlet has a “zero tolerance” policy regarding bullying behavior, and that management will ban aggressors from Goodwill stores and contact law enforcement if things escalate.

“Our goal,” he said, “is to ensure that it’s not going to happen again.”

### **Finding connection**

The bin-digging experience isn’t only about being pushy and hitting pay dirt, despite the perpetual Black Friday feel.

Some people will make a day out of a trip to the outlet, sitting around in groups and eating their lunches together. In the summer, employees will even set up an ice cream machine in the middle of the outlet floor.



(Rick Egan | The Salt Lake Tribune) Braxton Johnson spends time looking for vintage clothing at Goodwill Outlet on Wednesday, May 12, 2021.

Regulars like Braxton Johnson have found community here.

Johnson, 20, said he visits Goodwill Outlet almost every day. As he dug through the bins, he said there were a few customers he knew there that day, fellow resellers who have gotten to know one another as they line up outside before the store opens. They have even become familiar with one another's "niche" and what they tend to look for. Johnson said if he finds something he knows other resellers will like, he'll grab it, then trade it for something they have that he wants.

Johnson considers himself more of a casual reseller. "I sell a little bit to my friends," he said, "but mostly just buy clothes for myself."

He mainly looks for vintage T-shirts, "anything '90s, '80s, earlier than that," and "any pop culture." When he does resell clothing, he said, it's through Instagram ([@natick\\_vintage](https://www.instagram.com/natick_vintage)).

Abba Sopoye is a 23-year-old artist and designer who was born in Chad, in northern Africa, and raised in Salt Lake City. When he wanted to start sewing clothing, he didn't have the means to buy brand-new fabric in a craft store, he said. So he would search in the outlet bins for the material he needed, and use that instead.

With self-taught sewing skills, Sopoye often combines dissimilar components into one-of-a-kind pieces that are, he said, "functional" and "timeless."

On his Instagram ([@akouyajohan](#)), Sopoye posted a picture a few months ago of a puffer vest he made out of a kids' sleeping bag from 1993. He gave the bright graphic of the Tasmanian Devil from "Looney Tunes" a touch of luxe detail through the addition of a Gucci zipper taken off a sweater. Out of the dozens of comments Sopoye got on that post, most of them were simply fire emojis.

Sopoye and Johnson both belong to Generation Z, the generation that was born in the late '90s, after millennials. Now, the oldest Gen Zers are in their early 20s. And they're all about thrifting.

On social media websites like TikTok and Instagram, resellers post their finds with hashtags like [#goodwillbins](#), [#goodwillhaul](#), [#thrifflip](#), [#thrifthaul](#) and [#resellercommunity](#).

In a TikTok post captioned "Gawd damnnn" that has been watched 1.6 million times, Utah reseller [@brethren.vintage](#) shows off a distressed gray Nike hoodie he found at the bins. "Holy grail right there," one comment reads.

Asher said the shoppers he typically sees in Goodwill Outlet are "skewing younger." Oftentimes, Montes said, it's those younger shoppers who have a resale hustle. To her, the current popularity of thrifting — and the commotion it brings to Goodwill Outlet each day — feels almost inevitable.

"It's just that style tends to go and come back," she said. "What was popular 20 years ago somehow cycles its way back in."