

# SHOPtalk

Mennonite Central Committee Binational Thrift Shop Network Winter 2007

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## The Network News

### Canada



*MCC Alberta provided picnic fare at an appreciation event for seventy volunteers.*

### Alberta - Calgary

*Anne Boehlig, MCC Alberta Thrift Coordinator*

Bowness Park in Calgary was a beautiful setting for the second annual Volunteer Appreciation event held on September 16, 2007. Words of appreciation were given to the volunteers and staff of the Calgary Thrift Shop for their contribution of \$260,000 over the past twelve months. Gladys Terichow, a writer for MCC Canada shared about her experiences in Ukraine last year (Jan/Feb 2007, a Common Place) and Abe Janzen., Executive Director of MCC Alberta talked about his recent trip to Uganda and Kenya. Peter Dueck (volunteer and board member) shared an inspiring story about receiving a cash gift of \$500.00 for MCC while picking up a furniture donation. This annual event will be continued and similar events are planned for both Edmonton and Lethbridge.

### United States



*l-r Floyd Blosser, Herb Swartz and David Stoltzfus are pictured with the Jesse James book that was donated to Booksavers of Virginia.*

### Virginia - Harrisonburg

*Herb Swartz*

On any given day during the week two or three volunteers are at their Booksavers' computers checking the value of donated books selected by the managers. For the most part this is routine work as books valued at over \$7.00 are priced and put on the system. Every once in awhile there is an excited "Wow!" when someone finds a book valued up to \$100 or more. Imagine what happened when a book entitled "The Life, Times and Treacherous Death of Jesse James", dated 1882, came up for pricing. A conservative estimate put the book at \$2,500. This was not only an occasion for a "Wow!" but also a "PTL". When any book sells we remember with thanksgiving the many generous donors and pray for those whom MCC is able to serve because of the many who buy our books.

*(continued on page 2)*

## Canada



*"I like working here-the volunteers are friendly, the work is interesting and it feels good to know that I am also helping a good cause," says Aaron Dawson*

### British Columbia

Aaron Dawson has been getting valuable job experience at an MCC Thrift Shop: shipping/receiving, customer service, answering the phone and learning how to direct calls appropriately. Aaron knows that when he is ready to go out to apply for a paying job, his resume will give him an edge over other applicants.

The Resume Builder Program gives young people valuable work experience and connects them with the work of MCC and Thrift Shops. Employers consider job experience as well as voluntary service when looking for good potential workers.

This 12-week program gives students the opportunity to experience many aspects of running a successful retail business. At the end of the session, they receive a certificate and a letter of recommendation to include with their resume. This win-win program also provides the MCC Thrift Shop with much-needed volunteers. They can also continue to volunteer once the program has ended- something Aaron definitely wants to do.

An outline of the Resume Builder Program is available at [mcc.org/thrift/resources](http://mcc.org/thrift/resources)

## United States



*In November, Helen Glick and Eric Raber of the Save & Serve Thrift Shop of Millersburg received the Chamber of Commerce 2007 Community Service Award, one of five coveted awards given annually by the Holmes County business community.*

*(Continued from Page 1)*

For more information about Booksavers, go to [www.booksavers.org](http://www.booksavers.org)



## Find the fit for you— at the Binational MCC Thrift Shop Network Conference

**May 28–June 1, 2008**

**Canadian Mennonite University,  
Winnipeg, Manitoba**

### You will be inspired, informed and motivated!

**Plan now to attend** – managers, board members and key volunteers from Thrift Shops in the \*United States and Canada

**Wednesday, May 28, 2008** – Late day arrival in Winnipeg

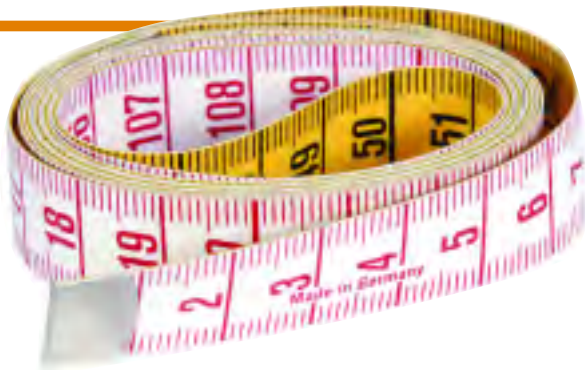
**Thursday and Friday, May 29 and 30** – General Sessions and Workshops featuring:

- V.J. Smith, motivational speaker, author of "The Richest Man in Town"
- Robert (Bob) Berg, Retired Vice-President Operations for Loblaw Companies, Westfair Foods, Senior Management with The Bay (25 years), MCC Alberta Fundraiser, Interim CEO Ten Thousand Villages Canada
- Coffee House – Featuring the "Second-Hand Pants Band"– wear your favourite Thrift Shop pants!

**Saturday, May 31** – Local touring

**Sunday, June 1** – depart for home

\* U.S. citizens must have a valid passport to enter Canada





Peter Brinckerhoff,  
author of *Mission-based  
Marketing and Mission-  
based Management*

## When Boards Fail in Their Role

This topic is a bit amorphous; it was suggested by a reader, and I really liked the concept, but it's hard to get your hands around. How can boards fail? Lots of ways. Here are some of the most common.

**1. They don't come to meetings:** You don't have a quorum, you don't get stuff done.

**2. They don't do their homework:** Board members who

come not having done their preparation are not ready to set policy or act as a check and balance on staff.

**3. They focus on management rather than policy:** This is pretty common, and happens a lot when staff members don't give smart, talented board members anything meaningful to do at meetings....they'll find something to fill their time, even if it means stepping over the line. Keep board members focused on policy by engaging them on key issues, and keeping them informed of new developments, in person, or online.

**4. They dis the organization (or other board members) in public:** This is like the black plague for an organization that needs public support and acceptance. It most often happens when there is not good leadership on the board itself. People feel that they are not getting their say, or that meetings are ineffective and they go outside to gripe.

**5. They disregard standard business practices.** *No budget? No problem! The resources we need will show up. No insurance? Well, we're a nonprofit, no one will sue us. No audit? Hey, we can't afford one, and our staff and board are all such good people....*

I've heard all of these. Just because you are mission-based does not mean you can ignore standard common business sense decisions.

**6. They ignore their own priorities or policies:** What's the point of having a strategic plan or financial policies if they are going to be ignored? This kind of waffling makes staff crazy, since they don't know what the board really wants. Note to boards who do this....you are even *more* liable as a fiduciary if you ignore your own policies, plans and priorities.

**So, what can you do as a manager or board member to reduce this kind of behavior? Try these actions.**

**1. Have job descriptions, including attendance expectations, for board members.** Enforce these requirements.

**2. Have a board mentoring program.** This will help get new board members on (pardon) board with the organizational culture and take their jobs seriously. Warning: pick your mentors carefully!

**3. Include non-board members on committees to evaluate potential board members.** This brings new skills and lets you make sure a potential board member is serious about meeting the organization's expectations.

**4. Send board leadership to leadership training.** Strong board leadership is key to strong, vibrant boards. Pay to have your leadership go. United Ways, MSO's, Community Foundations and often law and CPA firms have this kind of training.

**5. Mix your board: Half advocates for what you do, half business people with business skills.** the first group keeps you honest to my first rule of nonprofits: "Mission-Mission-Mission!". The second group keeps you honest to the second rule: "No Money, No Mission!"

Finally, and from personal experience, if you feel your board is failing, go talk to them, or get a consultant who will evaluate the situation and talk to them for you. DON'T let the situation continue! Your mission is too important to be sabotaged.

### For Board Members to ponder:

If shop expenditures were being paid from your own checkbook, how would your financial decision-making be affected? Remember - you are responsible for the fiscal health of the shop operation.



# Global Gleanings



services and supplies, such as school materials for children with HIV. Dr. Laverne and Mrs. Jean Landis, a retired Mennonite couple from Tunkhannock, Pa., attended the dedication along with four family members. The couple contributed to the clinic building project through MCC in honor of their daughter, Dr. Konnie Landis, who died of cancer in 2005.

Konnie Landis and her husband had visited Mengo Hospital on their honeymoon in 2004, and the new clinic was dedicated in her honor.

"To see something like this turn out as a memory or memorial to Konnie- it's so gratifying," Laverne Landis says.

*Tim Shenk is a writer for Mennonite Central Committee.*

## AIDS patients dedicate a new clinic in Uganda

*By Tim Shenk*

AKRON, Pa.- More than 30 AIDS patients sang together to celebrate the Oct. 19 dedication of an AIDS clinic that Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) helped build at Mengo Hospital in Kampala, Uganda.

For years, the staff of Mengo Hospital has struggled to care for AIDS patients in a smaller building without enough private rooms. The new clinic includes six counseling rooms, a pharmacy and other facilities to serve about 1,700 men, women and children with HIV.

MCC has supported Mengo Hospital's AIDS work for 15 years. The hospital serves many low-income urban neighborhoods of Kampala, Uganda's capital city, where more than eight percent of adults have HIV.

In the early years, the hospital could only fight the infections that AIDS patients chronically suffer. However, in recent years, Mengo Hospital has given patients a new lease on life by providing AIDS medications supplied by the Ugandan Health Ministry.

This year, MCC provided more than \$90,000 to build the clinic, in addition to paying for some medications, patient



*Damage from Cyclone Sidr in Bangladesh. Photo by LHCBACT International.*

Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) is planning to provide \$500,000 in assistance to cyclone survivors in southern Bangladesh, including rebuilding 1,250 to 1,500 houses that were destroyed by the storm, which made landfall on November 15, 2007.

MCC is appealing to its constituents to contribute \$300,000 for this response.

Financial contributions may be made to any MCC office or online at [mcc.org/donate](http://mcc.org/donate). They should be designated for MCC's "Bangladesh Cyclone Disaster Response."



## Working for chocolate

Ruth Unrau

When a woman retires, what does she do with her college majors in business, English, and library science? The answer, of course: she starts a used-book store.

My husband Walt and I, even before retirement, had taken volunteer assignments, receiving salaries that covered room, board, and an occasional Cadbury chocolate bar.

After we returned to North Newton, Kansas, from two years with Mennonite Ministries in Botswana, I retired. I read a book, *A Complete Guide to Starting a Used Bookstore*, and then I and a dozen volunteers opened a small bookstore. It flourished; that is, we took in enough to cover expenses and make a modest monthly contribution to Western District Conference.

After thirteen years, we sold the store to a group who enlarged its space and vision, and we moved to Bluffton, Ohio.

I asked a friend, "Do you think a used-book store could make it in this town?"

"No, I don't think so. People here don't buy books."

Undaunted, we found a space on Main Street and started collecting books. We affiliated with Et Cetera, the MCC thrift shop, added its wall of books to ours and opened with volunteers. We received donations of books daily, so many that I no longer had an excuse to go to auctions and garage sales.

We sell books priced from 25 cents for some paperbacks and \$10 for beautiful bird books and classics; categories from art to zoology; authors from Alcott to Zigar. We sell books to preschoolers and to people pushing walkers. The volunteers at Et Cetera direct customers to us, and we inform strangers about Et Cetera and Mennonite Central Committee.

After five years, the store continues with affirmation from book donors and book buyers in surrounding communities. Then, too, we profit from the reputation and goodwill acquired by Et Cetera and Ten Thousand Villages in this community.

Our small business will probably make a profit of \$12,000 this year. Melinda and Bill Gates do better, and we applaud their professional approach to the improvement of world health. And then we check to see what MCC can do with our \$12,000. A sewing machine for a woman in Africa or India costs \$75. Book ReViews, Et Cetera, could be helping 160 women to develop businesses that will feed and clothe their families. That makes us feel useful.



*Ruth Unrau found a perfect fit for herself in the MCC Thrift Shop Network— she started a used book shop.*

Recently a prison chaplain spent \$150 on books on religion to stock a new library. Two more sewing machines!

So what's the point? It's about retirees who find places where they can use their skills and offer a Christian response to world needs.

(Disclosure: I do take a token salary for managing the bookstore. It doesn't pay for room and board, just for chocolate bars.)

### MCC Thrift Shop Network 2007 Volunteer Survey Results

#### Canadian Thrift Shop Network

Number of responses from 56 shops in five provinces: 1,874

- The highest number of volunteers has served 1-5 years: **31%** of respondents
- The largest group serves 5-12 hours per week: **40%**
- **72%** of volunteers are over the age of 65; followed by **20%** who are between 51- 65 years of age - **2%** are under the age of 18

**40%** of volunteers responding told us they are motivated to serve in an MCC Thrift Shop by a desire to help others ...

**27%** of volunteers were motivated by the opportunity to build friendships and socialization while volunteering in an MCC Thrift Shop

**23%** indicated their motivation to volunteer was to support MCC and its mission

#### United States Thrift Shop Network

Number of responses from 48 shops: 1,641

- The highest number of volunteers has served 1-5 years: **36%**
- The largest group serves 4 hours or less per week
- **72%** of volunteers are over the age of 65; followed by **19%** between the ages of 51-65 - **2%** are under the age of 18

**33%** of volunteers responding told us they are motivated to serve in an MCC Thrift Shop by their desire to help others

**32%** of volunteers wanted to support MCC and its mission

**22%** indicated they were motivated the opportunity to build friendships and socialization while volunteering in an MCC Thrift Shop

To view full volunteer survey results go to [mcc.org/thrift/](http://mcc.org/thrift/) resources. Contact your country coordinator for a user id and password.



## Advent Greeting

Your gifts of time and resources have provided:

**Water** – enough to live

**Food** – enough for today

**Shelter** – a place to call home ...

for people in often-forgotten places throughout the world.

**Thank you!**

**Blessings to each of you in this Season of Hope.**

## Trends in home furnishings

Cleaner, straighter lines are being applied to sofas, chairs, dining room sets and bedroom sets. Many homes today have “great rooms” that are open to the kitchen and this furniture styling goes along with the less complicated approach to decorating. Corduroy-look fabric is in.

Colours to watch for: black and white is very big and chocolate brown is being paired with shades of turquoise. Watch for accessories in these colour ranges and display them in room groupings of furniture.

Metal wall art is a popular alternative to paintings and taller lamps are an incoming trend.



### It's Winter! – Curl up with a good book.



Censorship is a controversial topic in many MCC Thrift Shops. By posting a disclaimer in several places throughout your book area, you may help customers understand the high volume of books which come and go. Books, compact discs, DVD's etc. with blatantly objectionable covers should not be placed for sale.

Suggested wording for book disclaimer:

We cannot censor, neither do we endorse the content of the books, (compact discs, DVD's, videos etc). available for sale in this area.

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