

# Donations To Vocations.

The story of Goodwill. The first 90 years.

## Introduction

“Hey, Mike, can you come here a minute?”

“Where are you? . . . Alice?”

“I’m in the closet.”

“Oh, okay. Why are you in the closet?”

“I’m getting ready to go to Goodwill. Do you ever wear this blue suit anymore?”

“No, I got that new one to replace it.”

“Good. That’s one. How about this gray one?”

“That never did look right on me.”

“Two.”

“What about these pants? They look brand new.”

“I got those when we went on that grapefruit and prunes diet. They’re a little, uh, tight now.”

“Into the pile?”

“Yeah, I guess so.”

“And these shirts? Do you wear them?”

“Yes. No. Yes. Yes. No. Yes. Yes. No. Yes.”

“Really? I’ve never seen you wear that one.”

“Okay, no. . . . But don’t take that one.”

“Really? The Hawaiian print? I thought you were over that.”

“Never.”

The Goodwill Grab 'n Go. It’s a scene repeated in countless North Georgia homes every week. Cleaning out closets and donating goods to a local Goodwill is standard operating procedure for many. It’s been that way for a long time.

Since 1925, Goodwill has taken collected clothes and other items and turned them into jobs. Menders once upon a time repaired gently used dresses, suits, and other articles on pedal-operated sewing machines, and then re-sold them. The process isn’t still the same, but ninety years later, that basic premise still holds true, only on a much grander scale.

What hasn’t changed is the Goodwill mission. The original cornerstone of *employment for all* has been the foundation since Goodwill began. Today, at Goodwill, the mission is a simple one: *We Put People To Work*. But the story isn’t just about donated clothing and goods.

From humble beginnings in a small Atlanta house, Goodwill has grown to operate retail stores, donation centers, career centers and a variety of job training and employment services across the region. A sister organization, Goodwill Industries of North Georgia, specializes in facilities management and custodial services.

On these pages, you’ll find the true tale of 90 years of dedication, perseverance, humility, and thankfulness. The journey from 1925 through 2015 includes inspiring

stories, humorous stories, difficult stories, hard times stories, make-a-difference stories, and what-the-heck stories. It's a remarkable history of giving "a hand up, not a hand out."

# Chapter One

## **Because every book has a beginning.**

When you were a kid in school, what was the worst thing about learning history? All the dates and numbers you had to memorize, right? Like the Battle of Hastings in 1066 A.D. Or 1776. (That was an easy one). Or the fact a territory needed a population of 60,000 before it could become a state. Or that Columbus sailed in 1492 with three ships, 88 men, dried fish, salted meat, live pigs, rice, cheese, figs, glass beads, brass rings, spices, gold, silver, etc.

Well, this history of Goodwill is not going to be about numbers. There may be a few thrown in here and there because numbers and dates are necessary to show progress and timelines. But, for the most part, this is a history of people. Employees, donors, officers, board members, auxiliaries, those who have been trained for jobs, those who have been placed in jobs, sorters, drivers, and countless other people. People and the work they do. Because, after all, the *We Put People To Work* mission of Goodwill is not about numbers, it's about people. And this is a story about many different ones.

Now, having said that, here are just a couple of numbers of interest: In 1925, the first year in business, there was a grand total of three employees with yearly revenue of \$2,801.42. At the end of 2015, it is projected Goodwill will have 2,700 employees, put 16,500 people to work, and have revenues approaching \$150,000,000.

As mentioned in the introduction (You *did* read the introduction, didn't you?), there's a lot more to Goodwill than cleaning out your closet and dropping off your clothes. (By the way, to make matters simple and avoid confusion, throughout the book, the organization will just be called "Goodwill." It's had a few other names such as Goodwill Industries of Atlanta, Atlanta Goodwill, and more, but it's really just always been Goodwill. So that's what we'll stick with.) Goodwill provides job training and employment services to people who are having trouble finding work, want to change careers, or start their own businesses. With the organization's support, Goodwill participants overcome employment hurdles caused by physical, emotional, and developmental disabilities, limited job skills, poverty, and other challenges. Goodwill sells donated clothing, books,

furniture, and household goods in stores across North Georgia, and the proceeds help fund its mission of putting people to work.

Most of the donations that help fund the mission are in excellent, good or at least pretty good shape. But not always. Nothing is wasted, but not everything makes it to the sales floor. (More on that in a minute.) However, Goodwill takes practically everything. Really. Practically everything. Like shoes and boots, shirts and slacks, computers and cameras, and a few things that defy description. (Look for a slightly more interesting list in a few pages.)

The mission of Goodwill is simple, direct, and easy to understand: *We Put People To Work*. Even the punctuation at the end is important. *We Put People To Work*. Period. That's what happens every day at every Goodwill location and why Goodwill even exists. Putting people to work is the who, what, when, where, how and why of the organization. It always *has* been that way and always *will* be that way.

That hasn't changed since the beginning. And it goes for people too. Goodwill never discriminates, whether it's race, creed, color, disability, ugly lamp, wild tie, yesterday's bestseller, or just something that seemed like a good idea at the time. It's just not part of the program to turn anybody or anything away.

All the clothing and merchandise that gets funneled through donation centers is carefully scrutinized. Everything is first sorted into usable and non-usable. Remember, Goodwill takes almost everything . . . but that doesn't mean it keeps everything. Usable shirts, pants, dresses, coats, ties, skirts, blouses, clocks, TVs, rocking chairs, easy chairs, toys, desks, you name it, are checked out, hung on hangers by color (the clothes, that is), and soon thereafter make their way to the racks and shelves at the retail stores. What doesn't make the cut is often bundled and sold to recyclers and even resellers.

Here come a few more numbers. But you don't have to memorize them. Goodwill currently handles too many pieces of clothing and merchandise to count every year (but figure it's more than three dozen and a bit less than the national debt). That's a whole bunch per each employee, not just the ones whose job it is to collect and sort all that stuff. And the numbers continue to grow. On the people side, Goodwill has put

approximately 73,000 to work in the community in 90 years, and expects to place 100,000 workers during the current long-term plan period of 2013-2018.

Edgar Helms would be very proud.

Who?

Edgar Helms. That's a name you need to know. Read on to discover more.