

BY CHRISTOPHER SHEFFIELD

Last year the name of a Memphis shopping landmark disappeared from the retail landscape, when Goldsmith's became Macy's.

The Macy's name change happened gradually. But another Memphis institution didn't take quite the same slow, methodical rebranding approach three years ago.

In an attempt to convey a more upscale image equal to its inventory of men's, women's and children's clothing, accessories and housewares, the Junior League of Memphis changed the name of its long-time retail operation almost overnight to Repeat Boutique.

As part of the rebranding, the shop also got a new, hipper logo and moved two blocks east to a smaller, but cleaner,

strip location from its long-time Summer Avenue spot on "thrift store row."

Repeat Boutique
Clothing store
Owner: Junior League of Memphis
Address: 3586 Summer
Phone: (901) 327-4777
Web site: www.jlmemphis.org

Current Junior League of Memphis president Courtney Murrah says running a retail business in today's competitive climate is tough, especially with the likes of Wal-Mart, Target and

dollar stores all siphoning off thrift stores' clientele.

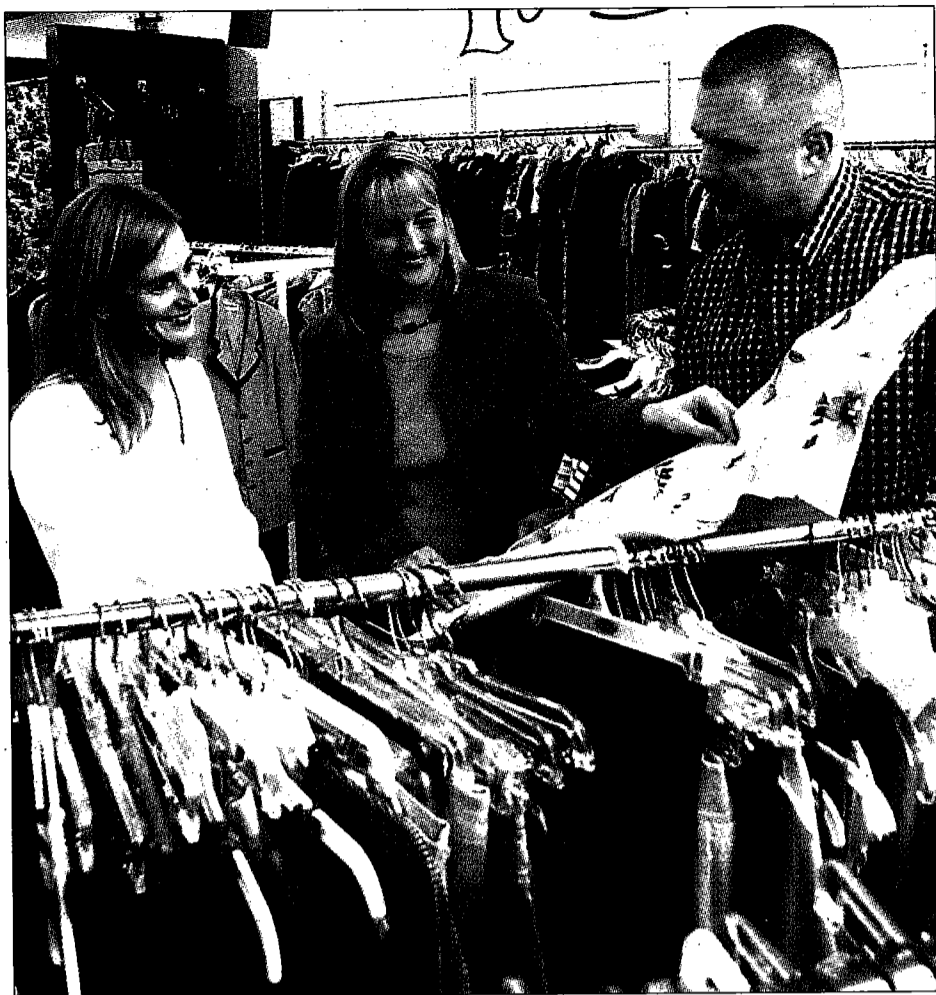
"It's a challenge to run a store like that," she says. "There are a lot of other options."

In the first couple of years after the move sales dropped significantly, almost 25%. Last year, business began to rebound with net sales of \$180,000 and net profit of \$55,000, contributing to the league's annual budget of about \$750,000.

Dick Outcalt, partner with retail consultant Outcalt and Johnson: Retail Strategist in Seattle, says the drop in business Repeat Boutique experienced is not unusual.

Moving a store can result in a loss of 10%-15% of sales; a significant name change can result in another 10%-15%, Outcalt says.

But despite the challenges, Outcalt, who says he is familiar with Junior Leagues and their thrift stores, predicts the store will turn around. There are 65 Junior League thrift stores around the world, according to The Association of Junior Leagues International.



ALAN HOWELL | MBJ

Karen Wilson, Courtney Murrah and manager Bart Lambert in Repeat Boutique

Rebound after rebrand

Junior League of Memphis sees sales on the rise following name change, new location

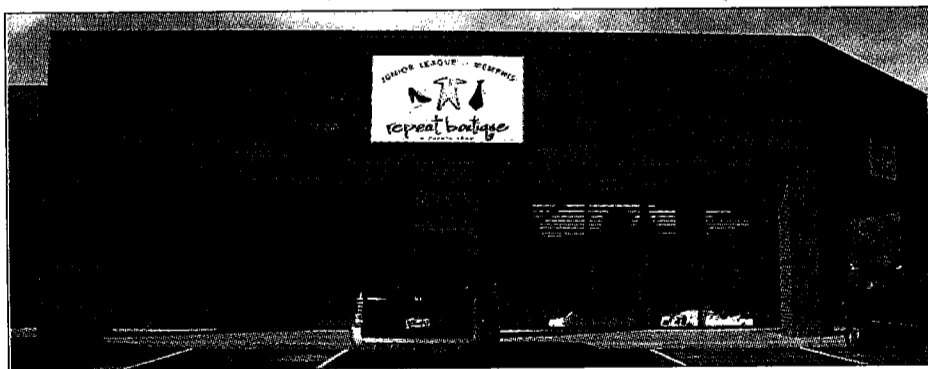
"There's no shortage of smarts at the Junior League of Memphis," he says. "They'll figure this out."

The rebound indicates the changes are paying off.

The Repeat Boutique sign was modified to add the words "Junior League of Memphis" to reconnect it to its important roots. A sign saying "Thrift Store" also was added, and for a short time the league took the unprecedented step of paying for billboard advertising on Sam Cooper Boulevard, which pointed the way to the Repeat Boutique.

To help with pricing, one price system was created, meaning all men's suits were \$10, women's jeans were \$5, ties \$1 and paperback books \$.50. Prior to the price list, it was subjective, says Kelly Lamanna, current Junior League treasurer, which meant it took longer to get product out of the back and on the sales floor.

The store also recently implemented a \$1 clearance sale rack for items that don't meet the league's standards, which require clothes to have working zippers, no rips, no missing buttons



Challenge: Convey message of higher quality products to broader clientele

Solution: Rename store, select better location and improve in-store merchandising

Challenge: Keep merchandise fresh and keep it out of storage

Solution: Institute clearance rack, one price pricing system, dedicate less room for storage

and to be stain free.

"It's a test market right now to make sure our image doesn't go down," says Cathy Garner, a thrift store volunteer for 18 years.

The store's manager, Bart Lambert, was also a new addition. Brought on with the move, Lambert had 15 years of retail experience in both property management and retail sales and has helped with in-store merchandising.

Before all the changes, Junior League Thrift Shop had been a name known locally for 57 years. A group of Junior League members decided in about 2002 to do some updating. The challenge they faced was to create a physical store and image that parlayed its reputation for carrying higher-end merchandise.

Call it a retail DIY project without the TV cameras or an especially perky host.

"We knew we had to make some major changes," says Junior League member Elizabeth Eggleston. "The members didn't like working there because they thought it was dirty and scary. I don't know about scary, but it was dirty."

Eggleston, daughter-in-law of noted photographer William Eggleston, was one of 10 members who took nearly a year to come up with a name, find new space and coordinate the move.

Finding clothes and accessories by the likes of Polo, Burberry, Donna Karin and Prada isn't uncommon. The store also has toys, books, DVDs and VHS tapes, electronics and more.

"In my opinion, our store is different from the others (thrifts) because we do have such high quality merchandise," says Eggleston.

Looking back, Eggleston is a bit critical of the process, although she's very happy with the result.

"It was a great learning experience for me," she says.

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Elizabeth Eggleston, Junior League of Memphis

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