The thrill of the thrift: Demand for unique goods drives national expansions

Red White & Blue Thrift among firms adding stores, with latest going to San Diego



A shopper looks at sweaters at Buffalo Exchange, a secondhand clothing chain, in Tucson, Arizona. (Chris Hondros/Getty Images)

By Lou Hirsh
CoStar News
June 3, 2025 | 3:33 P.M.

At thrift stores across the nation, shoppers are looking for more than a bargain. One customer might seek a new home for a vintage coat, while another needs a

century-old set of gold-rimmed glasses for a themed dinner party.

These kinds of items are often lower priced than department store versions, and they're becoming more attractive as economic uncertainty leads to consumer caution. The outlets are also booming as younger shoppers seek sustainability and avoid fast fashion, often taking to TikTok, Instagram and other social media to show off their rare thrift finds.

It's like a treasure hunt for some, and stores are expanding to give the people what they want.

Red White & Blue Thrift is one company enjoying a renewed appetite among consumers for secondhand items. The bargain-focused retailer is bringing thousands of antique goods and collectibles to its next United States outpost in San Diego, and deals show it is opening or planning stores in Florida and Texas.

Buffalo Exchange, one of the biggest U.S. thrift store operators, is looking to expand to "destination shopping areas," the company says on its website. A smaller nonprofit operator, Arc Thrift Stores, has a new store in Albuquerque, its first outside Colorado. Meanwhile, online resale site ThredUp reported that customer sign-ups in this year’s first quarter were nearly double the number from a year earlier.

These operators are looking to meet increased demand among shoppers of all ages now searching out secondhand clothing and household items as traditional retailers are pressured to raise prices in the face of tariffs on imported goods, San Diego commercial broker Steve Avoyer told CoStar News.

“The business model was already going pretty strong, with operators like Goodwill and the Salvation Army out there looking for new spaces,” said Avoyer, president of Flocke & Avoyer Commercial Real Estate, a firm that handles leasing and related operations for more than 100 retail centers in Southern California. “But it seems to be picking up now because when items are donated or placed up

for consignment, it reduces the retailer's cost of merchandise and the overall costs of doing business."

Thrifting for space

There were 29,457 thrift stores operating in the U.S. as of 2024, an increase of 2.6% from the prior year, according to industry data firm IBISWorld. The number of those stores has grown at an annual average rate of 3.3% during the past five years. Industry professionals said tariffs on imported goods could accelerate expansions by regional and national resale companies.

To be clear, thrift stores also face the headwinds of high retail build-out costs. Retail availability is getting tighter across the nation, with just 4.8% of store space available for lease at the end of the first quarter, just above the all-time low of nearly 4.7%, CoStar data shows.

Avoyer said his San Diego-based firm is getting more inquiries about space availabilities from commercial and nonprofit thrift store operators seeking to expand their retail footprints.



Red White & Blue Thrift Store is among several secondhand retail chains growing their presence nationwide. (Red White & Blue Thrift Store)

Tenants are competing for high-quality available space, a battle that some cash-strapped operators may lose. Still, some thrift stores are beating out the competition to backfill space left behind by struggling retailers.

Red White & Blue Thrift is taking over a vacant Big Lots for its new San Diego store, slated to open later this year. It also took over a Big Lots for its latest Colorado outpost, which opened in February in the Denver suburb of Arvada.

In San Antonio, the company plans to open by early 2026 in a 45,000-square-foot space previously occupied by Goodwill, according to a filing with the Texas Department of Licensing and Regulation. That project involves a $1.8 million renovation of the space.

Red White & Blue's San Diego store will be its fifth in California, joining three in the Los Angeles area and one in the northern San Diego suburb of Escondido. Some of its most recent expansion has taken place in Florida, where it has nine stores operating, more than in any other state.

“We don’t have additional locations planned for California or western U.S. at this time,” a spokesman for the company said. While the company was not discussing specific planned sites, it has signed several leases nationwide over the past two years, in some cases for space vacated by other retailers.

Coming to fruition

Some retail executives said tariffs on imported goods could accelerate a trend that has already led to expansion in recent years by regional and national resale companies including Thrift Vintage Fashion and Wardrobe. The trend has also fueled a rise in websites and social media platforms focused on secondhand goods, such as ThredUp and The RealReal.

Based in Ventura, California, Red White & Blue Thrift has 29 U.S. stores. It plans to open by year’s end in a 30,000-square-foot San Diego space at 1655 Euclid Ave.

as part of a larger expansion that's been underway by the nearly 60-year-old thrift store operator for at least the past two years, as it plans more openings in coming years.

"I can’t provide a firm number at this time but I can tell you we are constantly evaluating new opportunities to expand," a company spokesman told CoStar News in an email.

Red White & Blue Thrift Store employs up to 100 staff members per location and has about 10,000 items put on display daily, including clothing, toys, kitchenware, décor items, furniture, electronics, books and athletic equipment. Locations also have recycling centers, and the chain’s marketing touts “vintage, designer, new, nearly new, antique and collectible goods.”

Expansion among commercial secondhand retailers was among U.S. trends identified last month by industry executives at the annual ICSC conference in Las Vegas.

Kristin Mueller, president of retail property management at brokerage JLL, said resale stores — also described in industry circles as “circular” or recycle-focused retailers — have grown more popular.

A surge in resale stores “is a trend that I've been watching for a while,” Mueller said during an ICSC panel event. “Now it’s really coming to fruition.”