

LAST CHANCE

MERCANTILE

benefitting

VETERANS TRANSITION CENTER
OF CALIFORNIA

Presented by:

Freya Read (Manager) & Tori Olson (Assistant Manager)

Presentation Time: xx minutes

INTRODUCTION

Last Chance Mercantile (LCM) re-opened our doors on July 31, 2021. We are a benefit supporting the missions of both the Veterans Transition Center (VTC) and Monterey Regional Waste Management District (MRWMD) which are:

“to empower veterans to move from crisis to self-sufficiency” -VTC

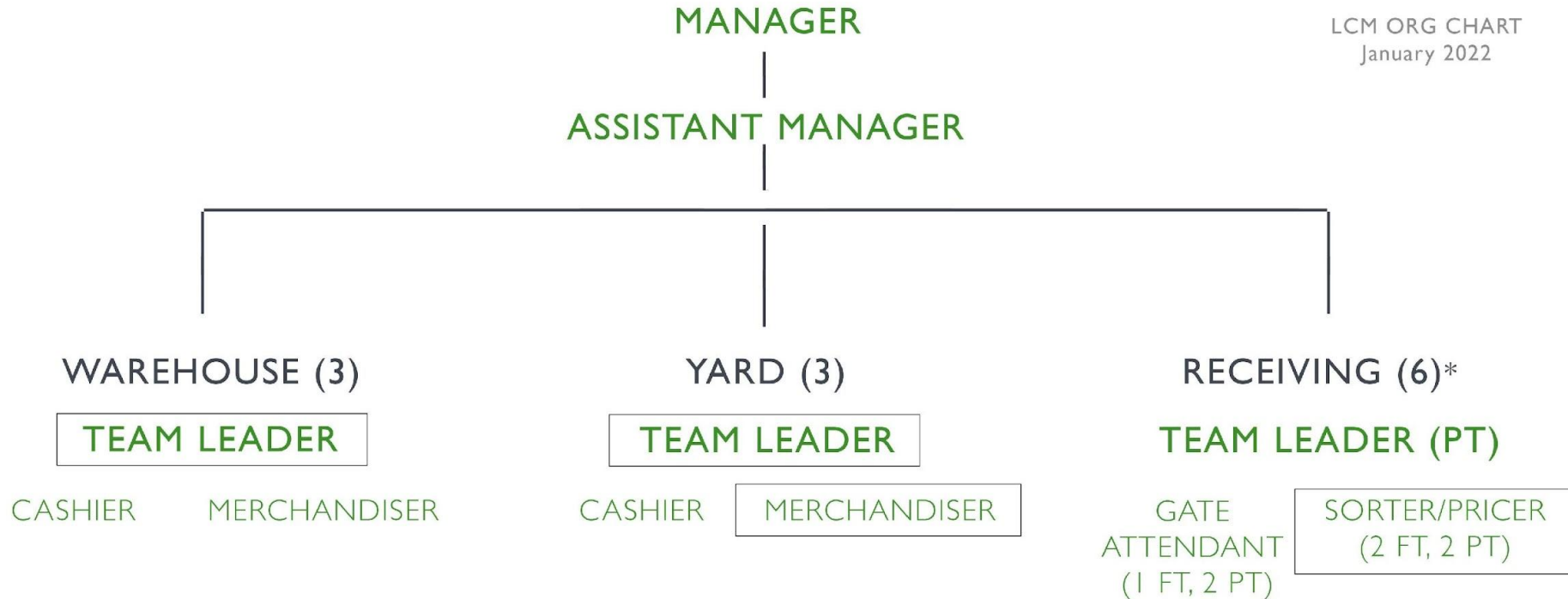
“turn waste into resources” -MRWMD

OVERVIEW

- Team
- Physical Site
- Sales & Waste Diversion
- Community
- Q&A

Team

LCM ORG CHART
January 2022



Team consist of 16 full-time & part-time employees or 14 full-time equivalents (FTE)

VTC Resident or former Resident (5)

* Receiving has a total of 8 employees which equate to 6 FTEs

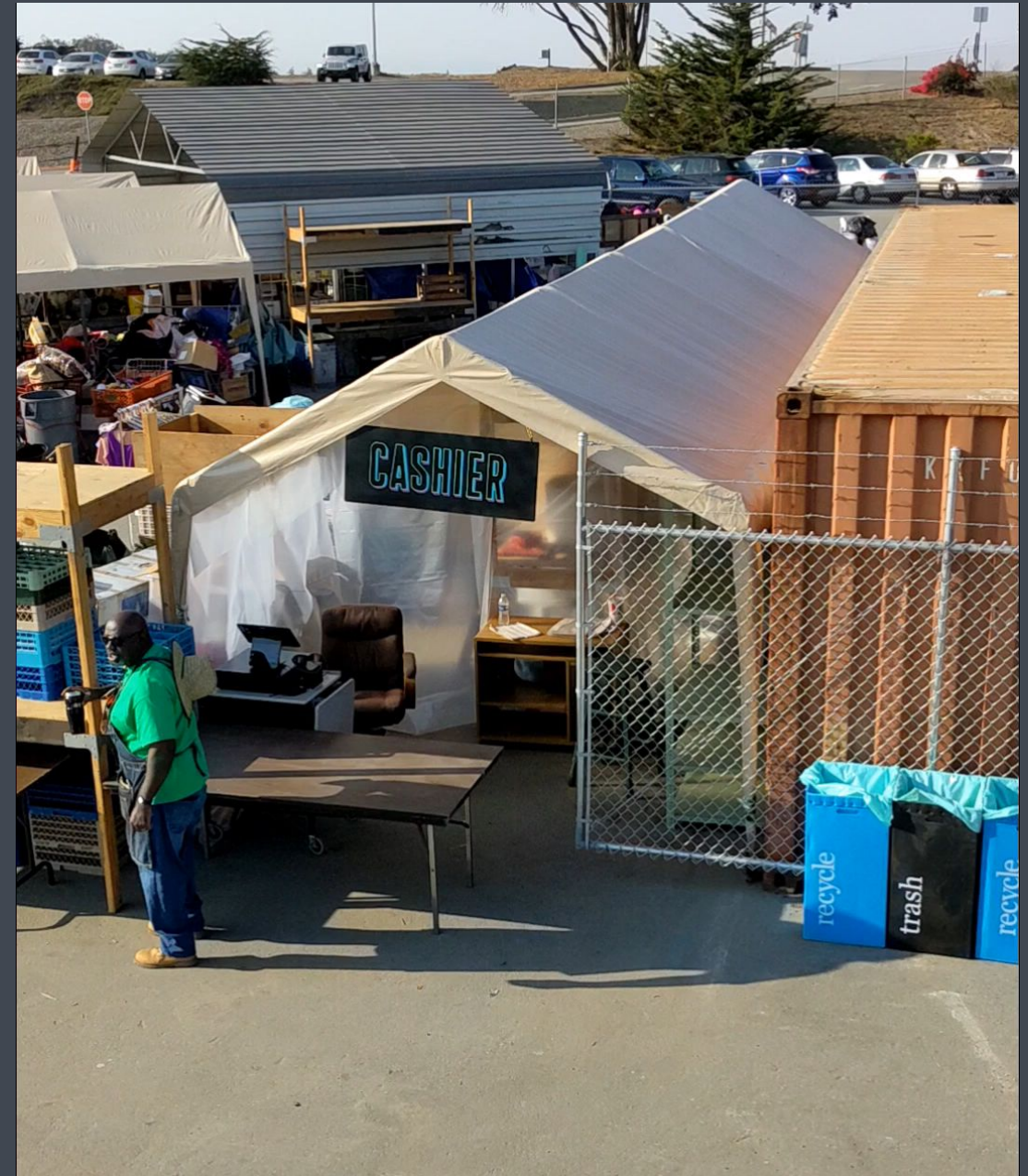
Team



- Increase yard & receiving staffing
- Develop official jobs training program for veterans from the VTC

Physical Site

- Full yard open 9/21
- Improve receiving process and workspace
- Experiment with layout of retail space



Physical Site



before



after

Sales & Waste Diversion

Last Chance Mercantile

Sales by Category Report

July 31st - December 31st, 2021

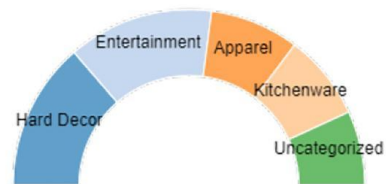
20884

Transactions

54549

Products

Top categories



LAST CHANCE MERCANTILE

Sales by Category - July 31-December 31, 2020

Category	Items Sold	Items-% of Total	Sales - % of Total
Uncategorized	7659	14.0%	18.5%
Hard Decor	9519	17.4%	18.5%
Auto/Construction	3630	6.6%	12.3%
Furniture	1366	2.5%	9.3%
Apparel	6909	12.6%	7.5%
Entertainment	9326	17.1%	4.4%
Kitchenware	5490	10.0%	4.1%
Electronics	1399	2.6%	3.8%
Holiday	1851	3.4%	3.6%
Sports/Leisure	744	1.4%	3.5%
Farm/Garden	1243	2.3%	3.5%
Art/Wall Decor	855	1.6%	2.5%
Appliances	412	0.8%	2.0%
Accessories	1145	2.1%	1.7%
Patio Furniture	330	0.6%	1.4%
Lighting	454	0.8%	1.3%
Toys	1966	3.6%	1.1%
Display/Retail Furniture	92	0.2%	0.7%
Soft Decor	165	0.3%	0.3%
Grab Bags	74	0.1%	0.1%
Office Supplies	16	0.0%	0.0%
	54645	100.0%	100.0%

Community



A land of Misfit Toys, toasters, barbells and more

By ELAINE HESSER

IT'S THE perfect name — The Last Chance Mercantile at the Monterey Regional Waste Management District's landfill just off Highway 1 north of Marina is a retail outlet for donated household items, diverting them from the decaying piles of detritus sinking into the earth nearby.

It's an ongoing rummage sale/treasure hunt that locals love. After being closed for more than a year because of

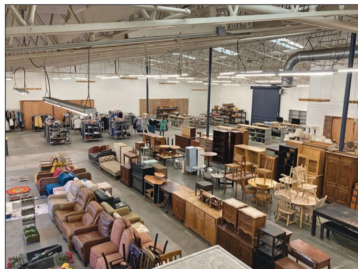
Covid, Last Chance reopened in July under the auspices of the Veterans Transition Center, which has its offices on the former Fort Ord in Marina.

The mercantile ran for more than a decade until 2020, but when it closed for the pandemic, it fell into an existential crisis. Zoe Shoats, MRWMD's director of communications, said that although it brought in about \$800,000

See **LAST CHANCE** page 12A



The Last Chance Mercantile north of Marina was closed because of Covid, but donated items continued to accumulate, spilling into its back lot (left). Workers from the Veterans Transition Center took over the shop and restored it to a pleasant shopping space (right).



PHOTO/COURTESY LAST CHANCE MERCANTILE



A reopened Last Chance Mercantile gives old stuff new life, and gives the veterans in charge a new life as well.

Sara Rubin Nov 27, 2021

- Face to Face
- 831
- Street Talk
- Astrology
- Outside
- Obituaries



Greg Speech, now a team leader at Last Chance Mercantile, was homeless before landing at the Veterans Transition Center. "Without this program, I don't know where I'd be," he says.

DANIEL DREIFUSS

It was not a linear journey for Freya Read to find herself managing a thrift store and a team of volunteers. She long ago left the world of Wall Street, where she worked as an equities analyst, for California, where she raised a family and became a product designer for Pottery Barn. It was a career job, but as her kids grew up it was time for a change. "I sort of got religion, or got tired, and I was looking around for more meaning," Read says. So she moved from Berkeley to Carmel and opened her own consignment store, Perch Decor. Then the pandemic hit and she closed the store. Divorced, unemployed and drifting during shelter-in-place, her interest was

piqued when she heard from a former Perch customer, Kurt Schake. Schake is executive director of the nonprofit Veterans Transition Center, which offers programs to house and rehabilitate veterans struggling with challenges like homelessness or who are just getting out of prison. The nonprofit last year won a bidding process from the Monterey Regional Waste Management District to take over operation of the district's beloved secondhand store, Last Chance Mercantile. Some clients of VTC could staff the store, but they would need a seasoned manager. Enter Read. She inherited a sprawling complex, including a yard covered with furniture, plumbing fixtures — rows of toilets and bathtubs were a mainstay. "It was pandemonium," Read says.

But with a team of 13 staff and roughly 50 military volunteers, the group cleaned out the old inventory, much of which had been ruined after sitting out for over a year during the store's pandemic-era closure. Read made mock-ups of a much cleaner, open retail space; she calls it "reuse Ikea." The idea was to "make it very shoppable and clean — not frumpy, but trying to honor reuse and the items that we have."

Today's store feels more open and organized than the old version. Tents on the lot out back denote different categories of items (one for garden supplies, another for clothes; there's a sporting goods area). A new cashier station outside with signage makes it obvious where to go. David Solorio, who worked for Last Chance for over 11 years before the closure, is back at the outdoor register. "I like that it's more user-friendly," he says. "I love this new crew."

While there is still plenty of low-cost merchandise in questionable condition, including inventory that comes salvaged from MRWMD's trash sorting facility next door, there are higher-end items that are priced accordingly.

Among the items available on a recent afternoon: a beautiful table with a marble top in perfect condition (\$325); a pair of boogie boards in good condition (\$3); intricate leather saddles (\$150); a lamp shaped like a birdhouse (\$20); a wooden wine rack (\$1.50).

Some long-time customers have complained, a la "fancy at the dump now," Read says, but inventory moves fast — both \$3 boogie boards were gone within a 10-minute walk around the yard. And diversity of quality and price point adds variety. "That makes it more interesting to shop," Read says.

Like Read, team leader Amos Johnson had a non-linear path to get here. A 14-year Marine Corps veteran who moved to Marina in February as a VTC client, he first landed a job at the MRWMD landfill. With his VTC case worker, he says, "They helped me get my driver's license, an ID card — everything I needed to become a new person." Now 62, he's planning to get married for the first time.

It is about to get a hip replacement and has a job he's proud of. "We try to make every area as neat as possible," he says. "We are getting better and better."

Inside, another team leader, Greg Speech, is also a VTC client. The Vietnam War veteran landed at VTC after he got out of jail in Southern California, and at 68, says he's got a whole new lease on life. "Better late than sorry," he says. "I feel so blessed and fortunate to work here. It's like brothers and sisters."

LAST CHANCE MERCANTILE is open 9am-4pm Tuesday-Saturday. 14201 Del Monte Blvd., Marina. 264-6900. lastchancemercantile.org.

Community



Spring 2017 Artist in Residence (AIR) exhibition

Questions