

8 easy ways to fatten your pocketbook

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Staff Writer

Remember, when you were a kid, and you wanted to make some quick cash? Maybe you did some extra chores around the house or mowed a neighbor's lawn. If you were really ambitious, you could set up a lemonade stand.

It may not be that easy as an adult, but there are still ways to put extra change in your pocket, whether you're trying to pay down a credit card or save up for that big-screen TV.

Here are 8 ideas to get you started.

1 Make money doing what you love.

Take some time to assess what you really enjoy and are good at, and you may find a hidden source of income, says career coach Helen Harkness, president of Career Design Associates Inc. in Garland.

"Things that we are naturally, instinctively good at, things that are our talents, we take them so much for granted that we don't realize that not everybody has that talent, and we



Renee Travelstead supplements her income by walking Morgan, a 15-year-old Irish setter, for Professional Pet Sitters of Dallas.

RANDY ELI GROTHE/Staff Photographer

can take that to the workplace."

Do you have top-notch organizational skills? Help others get it together as a professional organizer. Great with numbers? Set yourself up as a part-time bookkeeper.

Love to garden? Grow and sell organic produce.

These are actual examples Ms. Harkness has seen of women finding ways to make money doing what they love. But it has to start with a thorough self-examination.

"If we're going to succeed in today's crazy

world, we have to know our skills and our talents. There's no way we can do it if we don't know what we're good at," she says.

2 Try dog-walking on for size.

Olga Wharton, owner of Professional Pet Sitters of Dallas (www.petsittersofdallas.com), pays dog-walkers up to \$16 an hour. For someone who loves pets and enjoys being outdoors, it can be an excellent way to make

some extra cash.

Professional Pet Sitters serves several neighborhoods in Dallas, and Ms. Wharton generally looks for people from those neighborhoods who are available at specific times during the day. Dog-walkers can work anywhere from 5 to 20 hours a week. Although the work is part-time, Ms. Wharton discourages applicants who are looking for temporary work. "When I'm hiring pet-sitters, I try to look for someone part-time but long-term," she says.

What started as a hobby became a full-time business for Ms. Wharton, but if you're just looking to supplement your income, she suggests working for an established company.

"If you're working for a pet-sitting company, you have control of your own schedule," she says. "It's very flexible — and it keeps you in great shape."

For more information about pet-sitting, check out the National Association of Professional Pet Sitters Web site at www.petsitters.org.

3 Answer a casting call.

"A lot of people think it's hard to get into this business, but it's not. It's easy," says Tracy Terrell, producer and casting director for Key Squared Productions in Las Colinas. "The majority of people attracted to it are grown-ups who need some extra money or who have always wanted to be on TV."

Ms. Terrell says the Dallas area is a great place to find work as an extra or helping out a film crew. "You can make 100 bucks a day following a director around on a movie set."

The best way to find work is to skim through newspaper classifieds and Web sites, such as Craigslist.org, Mandy.com and Myspace.com, she says. Not all jobs pay, but the agency should tell you up front what to expect.

"Sometimes it's just food and they're promised a copy of the finished show. Sometimes it could be \$100 a day. Sometimes it could be \$50 an hour."

If you decide to answer the call, make sure you've cleared your calendar for the day, since being an extra almost always requires a lot of waiting around, she says. "You may get called to be there at 6:30 in the morning, but you're going to be waiting around for a long time."

As with any offer to make quick cash, though, you have to beware of scam artists. When responding to an ad, if you are asked for money, walk away, Ms. Terrell advises.

"To make extra money in this business, you do not need to spend money," she says.

Ms. Terrell says she's always looking for extras in the area. If you're interested, e-mail a head shot or recent photo and your contact information to tracy.terrell@comcast.net and she'll add you to her talent list.

4 Be a mystery shopper.

We've all gotten spam e-mails touting the earning potential for mystery shoppers, but there is a legitimate market for mystery shoppers — with no investment required.



NATHAN HUNSINGER/Staff Photographer

Try a casting call: Brett Boulin reads lines as an extra during production of an advertisement for the American Heart Association.

The Mystery Shopping Providers Association estimates there are 1.5 million mystery shoppers in the United States. As independent contractors, they help companies evaluate the service they're providing to customers.

Cathy Stucker, a professional mystery shopper in Houston for the past 10 years, literally wrote the book on mystery shopping. While teaching a class on "Solo-Preneuring," Ms. Stucker found there was a huge interest in mystery shopping but not a lot of informa-

tion on how to get into the business. So she did some research and wrote *The Mystery Shoppers Manual* (Special Interests Publishing, \$24.95).

"I'm a big believer in making money doing something fun," she says.

Not all jobs pay. Some simply offer reimbursement for the service being researched, but many also pay fees, which can range from \$8 to more than \$100, depending on the complexity of the assignment, Ms. Stucker says.

You should never be asked to pay to register with a company or to get information on mystery shopping jobs, she says, and you should be told up front what your compensation will be.

"I've gotten paid to get my hair done, go to the grocery store, get the oil changed in my car," she says. "I've gotten paid to do fun things I wanted to do or stuff I had to do anyway."

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The Mystery Shopping Providers Association Web site, www.mysteryshop.org, offers a wealth of information on mystery shopping, as well as an assignment board to search for jobs. The organization also offers a certification program.

Ms. Stucker offers a free e-mail course on mystery shopping on her site, www.idea-lady.com, as well as articles on mystery shopping and entrepreneurship.

5 Sell your books, CDs and DVDs.

"We buy pretty much anything ever printed or recorded. That includes books, music magazines, DVDs and movies," says Kelli Johnson, a spokeswoman for the Dallas-based Half Price Books, Records, Magazines.

Of course, you'll only get what the bookseller determines your books are worth, but depending on what you have and what condition it's in, you could pull in some cash.

"Everything is based on supply and demand," Ms. Johnson says.

For example, new best-sellers would tend to bring more than a book that's been out for a while.

"We love getting rare and collectible items as well," she says. "And we get really excited about first-editions or books signed by the author."

To find the closest store, go to www.half-pricebooks.com.

6 Turn in used video games.

If you've got games you've finished playing or the kids have outgrown, take them to GameStop (www.gamestop.com) or EB Games (www.ebgames.com). The Dallas-area stores pay cash for used video games and game consoles to anyone over 18.

"We buy back all games," says Chris Olivera, director of public relations for Game Stop. Pricing is set at the corporate level and is based on a number of factors including inventory, age of the game and market value, he says. Prices range from 25 cents to \$30 for a single game, he says.

7 Sell it in the classifieds.

Newspaper classifieds are a great way to sell things you no longer need or want. Web sites, such as Craigslist.org and LiveDeal.com, put a new twist on the old-fashioned classified ad.

Since its start in 1995, Craigslist has gained a following with its simple design



MICHAEL MULVEY/Staff Photographer

Got books? André Reese sells a bunch of books to Half Price Books on Northwest Highway.

and non-commercial approach. Listings are arranged by city, and the site has a flagging system to help weed out spam.

Ads are free in Dallas, and the Dallas site currently gets more than 20 million page views and more than 30,000 new classified ads each month, says spokeswoman Susan MacTavish Best.

"We like to help folks get everyday stuff done," she says, "from the mundane (I need a new car) to the fun (I need a running buddy)."

A relative newcomer to the local-classifieds business, LiveDeal.com was founded in 2003 by eBay veteran Rajesh Navar. Since then, traffic has grown rapidly, he says, and the site currently has more than 350,000 items listed for sale.

LiveDeal.com uses a slightly different model than [Craigslist](http://Craigslist.org), offering users the choice of browsing a local region within a 50-mile radius of their home or by city and state. LiveDeal.com has found a niche, Mr. Navar says, in connecting buyers and sellers of items that are tough to ship or that you might want to see before you buy, such as autos, furniture, appliances and pets.

Like [Craigslist](http://Craigslist.org), the site also has measures to block spammers. And like eBay, it has a dealer program, which lets you set up an online store.

Or sell it in *The Dallas Morning News* classifieds. Go to www.dallasnews.com/classifieds and click on "place an ad," or call 214-745-8123. The current rate for a 10-day merchandise ad is \$40.50 for 3 lines and \$13.50 for each additional line.

8 Put it on the auction block.

If you've been wondering what to do with that extra piece of furniture or a record collection gathering dust in the attic, maybe it's time to try your luck on eBay. Since its founding in 1995, the online auction site has become an extra source of income for millions.

According to a recent survey conducted for eBay by ACNielsen International Research, 1.5 million people said they supplement their income by selling on eBay. The site has a wealth of tips for novice sellers about registering, researching and listing

your item to maximize your profit.

If that still sounds like too much effort, companies such as OrbitDrop (www.orbitdrop.com) and AuctionDrop (www.auctiondrop.com) will do the work for you, including listing, selling and shipping the item.

"If you don't want to mess with the paperwork or the cumbersome things you have to do to sell on eBay, you bring your item to us, we photograph it, put it on eBay, and the minute it sells, we send you a check," says Sandi Eastwood, controller for Dallas-based OrbitDrop.

Such services do come with a price. OrbitDrop charges no initial fees, but for single-item sales, the item must have a minimum sale value of \$50.

Once the item sells, OrbitDrop takes a commission, which can be up to 39 percent of the sales price. Likewise, AuctionDrop's fees can be as high as 38 percent.

DallasNews.com/extra

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