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BUSINESS



PHOTOS BY TOM REEL/STAFF

'Cashing' in on trade

Brisk business has S.A. barter exchange planning to expand.

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Tens of thousands of years ago, hunters and gatherers exchanged bear skins for fruit and grains to maximize efficiency. By the 7th century B.C. metal coins became a means of exchanging value. Two millennia later, paper money backed by the guarantee of sovereign governments made its appearance.

But barter is a microeconomy that's still alive and

well. Companies such as Alamo Barter Corp. are part financial institution and part networking venue for cash-free business-to-business transactions.

With 725 member companies and annual transactions of \$13.2 million the firm is the largest barter organization in Texas.

Most of the transactions are not direct trades. Instead a plumber may unclog the pipes in a dentist's office. If both are members of the same barter group, the plumber may opt to take her pay in barter dollars. She now has a credit that can be "cashed" at any of the other barter members, which include lawyers, office furni-

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TOP: Alamo Barter Corp's President Rachel Taylor and Vice President, Victor Castaño maintain a retail showroom for members. ABOVE: Linda Andrus, broker at Alamo Barter, works with accounts below a list of members. BELOW: An exchange scrip for Crumpets restaurant is typical of documents used in barter.

