



April 24, 2008

Recycling via the ReStore

Shop that helps fund Habitat for Humanity has had a very successful year

*By Ellen S. Wilkove
Daily Record*

The time for spring cleaning is, well, yesterday.

Not your average "open the windows, vacuum, dust and mop" cleaning -- that could always be done, well, later.

Try packing up two boxes full of bank statements, prescreened credit card offers, those outdated cell phones and even ink cartridges. (You didn't throw them out did you?)

Yeah, that kind of cleaning.

(Hint: To reduce prescreened credit card offers and safeguard against identity theft, log on to <http://www.optoutprescreen.com/>.)

In a combined birthday and Earth Day celebration, the Habitat for Humanity ReStore in Mine Hill has come together with the National Association of Professional Organizers and Fairfield-based Shred-It to help you clean and green your house.

The day kicks off Saturday at 9:45 a.m. and includes music from WMTR radio, food and, of course, the option to shop at a deeply discounted rate.

A concept in the works since 1994, the ReStore opened to the public last May and has already established a following of bargain-hungry hunters and an eco-friendly nod from the Morris County Municipal Utilities Authority at its annual recycling awards. Operated mostly by volunteers, the ReStore employs one full-time director, and one part-time driver for pickups.

"We have exceeded our expectations," said Blair Wilson, executive director. "We met our financial goals in four months. It's very exciting."

The ReStore functions as a one-shop stop and self-service warehouse for building material and very gently used furniture and appliances that may have otherwise gone on to landfill.

Proceeds from purchases fund the construction of homes for Habitat for Humanity, which averages about \$150,000 per home, Wilson said.

The public can enjoy drastically reduced costs ranging from 50 percent off for new items up to 90 percent off for gently used.

"There was this brand new mahogany desk, handmade with leather inlay," she said. "It was given to us brand new in a box. It stayed on the floor for three months and we sold it at \$2,000. We know we could have gotten more."

The hot items on a recent Wednesday were a brand new cherry vanity and Kohler sink (\$695), donated by the winner of a tricky tray, and a like-new 11-piece dining room set (\$795) which sold by the day's end.

The items are priced comparatively by staff and volunteers, and the donors receive a receipt for a tax write-off.

"The idea is to keep the items moving," said Joanne Arnold, ReStore director. We're not a thrift store. We're raising funds to build homes."

However, not all donations make the cut. For example, appliances older than 6 years and mattresses are a no-no.

The appliances must be in working condition.

The gauge for accepting a donation comes down to this: Is this something we'd have in our house?

Furniture is accepted more on condition than age; for example, "this heavy duty couch from the '70s with gold velour," perfect for a college student to have for people to sleep on, Wilson said.

In addition to offering the public a bargain and furniture a second life, the ReStore also works with social service groups to identify people in need and make necessities available to them.

"We're not trying to compete with the Salvation Army or Market Street Mission," she said. "

The ReStore also works with area businesses such as Suburban Furniture in Succasunna, Jaeger Lumber in Madison and Kelly's Dinettes in Parsippany, to name a few, which donated brand new items such as windows, doors and dining room sets.

On Wednesday, Suburban Furniture was about to unload a shipment of brand new desk sets.

In addition to the ReStore celebrating its first year on Saturday, the National Association of Professional Organizers will help further the greening of the planet.

Just ask Carla Boissonault, founder and owner of Organized by Design in Morris Plains and a member of the association. In honor of Mother Earth, her Web site, <http://www.organizednj.com/>, this week was brimming with green tips of the week such as:

"Eliminate the need for disposable cups for beverages at work. Bring in your extra glasses and mugs from home. Your coffee will taste better too!"

In assisting her clutter-challenged clients in reduction, Boissonault also encourages them to contribute to the reuse component of recycling.

"Instead of adding things to a landfill, I take an environmentally friendly approach," she said. "Sometimes my clients have their own charities they'd like to donate too, or if they let me, I will personally take the items to local charities or recycle them myself."

This includes operable cell phones, computers and TVs that "may not be the latest and the greatest," but will find new life in, perhaps, a senior citizens group or daycare center.

Reducing and reusing is half the battle in eco-friendly organization. The cycle, once broken, benefits the client economically and ecologically.

"I try to get people to understand how much stuff they buy and don't need," Boissonault said. "I always hear, 'I spent all this money and never used it.'"

One such questionable pile may consist of financial statements or other documents tainted with personal information, too sacred to recycle as a whole sheet, but too clutter-some to stay.

"Because of identity theft, many people don't want to recycle documents that have their Social Security number or bank account numbers, so they just shred it themselves and throw it out," said Penny Jones, recycling education specialist with the Morris County Municipal Utilities Authority. "Shredding gives people security, plus the shredded paper (by Shred-It) is recycled."
