

Electronic Recycling Gains Momentum

Continued From Page 1



Demanufacturing foreperson Michelle Moss gives lessons on grading scrap parts to Steve Hoyt, a new employee. The Middlebury-based recycling service was founded by Robin Ingenthron.

scale. "The average price to recycle a computer or large television in bulk is about \$5, which includes collection fees, comparable to a New York bridge toll." He recommends that outfits with 10 or fewer products take them to the local solid waste district, where Good Point picks up bulk. (For a list of those facilities, people may visit www.anr.state.vt.us/dec/wastediv/solid/swmdlist.htm.)

After pickup, the materials are sorted for quality and content. Newer or easily repaired equipment and components are sold to companies around the world, directly or through the Internet, or else donated to nonprofits. Good Point waives its processing charge to organizations that off-load clean, working equipment which can be promptly turned around. Proceeds are returned to the company to offset operating and training expenses, or donated to WR3A (World Reuse, Repair and Recycling Association), a "fair trade" organization working in the export-for-reuse market.

Leftover units, representing most of the items collected, are disassembled to recover plastic, aluminum, copper, gold, steel, glass, lead, and anything else that can be moved through the scrap industry. Computer hard drives are cleared of data and software, or else physically destroyed, to meet security and licensing provisions. CRT glass, which contains lead, barium, and silica, is sent to State or United States Environmental Protection Agency-contracted glass furnaces and lead smelters, not mixed into wholesale metal scrap loads, or exported with working equipment as "toxics along for the ride."

Good Point practices comprehensive due diligence, not only to comply with environmental laws but to maintain its integrity. "As a former state director of recycling, co-executive director of a nonprofit organization, and former vice president of the region's largest television recycling company, my reputation is on every invoice, every work order, and every load," Ingenthron writes.

Reputation is important in the recycling business. A legitimate recycler must be able to vouch for the end market and certify the chain of demanufacture. Having a physical plant like Good Point aids credibility by demonstrating that the recycler is not just a deal-broker. This attracts the large purchase orders from reputable companies needed by Good Point to channel its materials productively around the world.

Good Point applies some of its revenues to funding WR3A, the nonprofit international trade organization that connects upstanding American recyclers to appropriate overseas refurbishers. Good Point also supports domestic employment by working with the Addison County Employment Services job training arm as well as with Rotary clubs to place Vermonters into a growing number of jobs created by the recycling industry.

Ingenthron compiled the following statistics while working at Massachusetts DEP: "Landfilling 1,000 tons per day will support about 10 jobs. Burning the same amount of material at an incinerator will support about 30 jobs. Mining 1,000 tons of material will

create about 60 jobs. Recycling 1,000 tons per day creates about 1,000 jobs. And each day Americans repair about 1,000 tons of electronics, supporting about 10,000 jobs. American Retroworks uses recycling programs to create more jobs, and train more people to work in them."

He adds that "There's an open door and no ceiling. All you need to get a job with us is be willing to pick something up, or learn to take something apart." Trainees move from demanufacturing to sorting, grading, and stocking, then inventory and repair. Opportunity exists to become certified technicians and programmers. "We see people for what they can do, not for what they can't do," Ingenthron says.

Looking into the future, Ingenthron anticipates two major areas of opportunity. "We think our future growth will be in recycled gold," he says, foreseeing a day when gold products will bear similar content labeling and cachet as recycled paper does now, with each piece stating the percentage of gold recycled from computers just as paper is labeled with post-consumer content.

The company has already acquired a patent for making recycled-gold wedding bands. Using such gold reduces the demand for new-mined material (from the most polluting industry on the planet) and adds an incentive for people to recycle electronics while it discourages unsafe export practices.

Additionally, the upcoming wave of high-definition digital television (HDTV) will create a counterwave of conventional televisions through the scrap channels. Toward this end, Good Point is setting up a processing facility in Mexico, where a market for analog televisions is expected to continue for years.

Back in Vermont, Ingenthron states that "In 2005, Vermont had the number two per-capita electronics recycling rate in the USA, without any legislation. Good Point is now recognized nationally as a model for what can be achieved without the heavy hand of government."

California, he notes, which is number three in per-capita recycling, has a state-run system that costs 68 cents per pound of gross electronics, compared to 18 cents per pound in Vermont. Vermont has the potential to become a national leader in all aspects of recycling.

When asked why more businesses aren't already participating, Ingenthron answers, "Because it's hard!" Recycling, especially substances like electronics, is highly regulated and highly complex. "Electronics aren't like wastepaper," he comments. "And the field has too low a threshold of entry for most venture capitalists."

Nevertheless, he says, "the only barrier to entry is knowledge." Good Point has not only crossed that barrier but pioneered new ground because "what we're good at is logistics."

Ingenthron concludes that recycling through vendors like Good Point does more than keep waste out of landfills and incinerators. It offers businesses an economical means of managing their assets while supporting sustainable business on the local, national, and global fronts, and offering avenues of opportunity. □

Chapter Of Local First, National Network Of Independent Businesses, Founded In Vermont

BY CAROLYN HALEY

Chris Morrow, the general manager of Northshire Bookstore in Manchester Center, has initiated the founding of Local First Vermont. This new chapter of Local First, a national network of independent businesses promoting the purchase of local goods and services, is the first to cover an entire state rather than a region.

Local First Vermont is an arm of the Business Alliance for Local Living Economies (BALLE), which operates on an international scale. Local First Vermont focuses on its home state, informing businesses, residents, government, and media about the advantages of keeping money in their communities.

"Locally owned businesses recycle a much larger share of their revenue back into the local economy, compared to chain stores," Morrow says. Citing a 2003 economic impact report performed by the Institute for Local Self-Reliance, he continues, "a case study in Maine found that local businesses spent 44.6 percent of their revenue within the surrounding two counties, and another 8.7 percent elsewhere in Maine, largely on wages and benefits paid to local employees, goods and services purchased from other local businesses, profits that accrued to local owners, and taxes paid to local and state government. Big box retailers return an estimated 14.1 percent of their revenue to the local economy, mostly as payroll. The rest leaves the state, flowing to out-of-state suppliers and back to corporate headquarters."

The Vermont Department of Agriculture puts it another way in its Buy Local Campaign. "If Vermonters shifted just 10 percent of their food purchases to locally grown food products, that would add more than \$100 million to Vermont's economy."

Extrapolating from here shows the potential to realize Local First Vermont's vision, stated as "a robust and sustainable economy fueling vibrant communities, built on the cornerstone value and practice of thinking 'local first.'"

It's not about buying locally to the exclusion of all else, Morrow clarifies. Rather, the slogan Think Local First means just that: look at your local options first before going to a chain or online. "Chain stores and online businesses have their place, but we hope local businesses get preference because of the many hidden costs to non-local options, which ultimately impoverish our communities."

Locally owned businesses, he explains, are less likely to relocate and take jobs with them. They need less investment in infrastructure and place a smaller demand on public services. They tend to use existing buildings, often in town centers, which prevents sprawl, consumes less natural habitat, and uses fewer resources for

transportation. And, because they are owned by people who live and work in a community, owners and customers directly experience the results of their decisions.

As well, Morrow notes that "small local businesses employ the largest number of people nationally, and small businesses account for the vast majority of job growth. A multitude of small businesses, each selecting products based on the needs of their local customers... guarantees a much broader and appropriate range of product choices, and ensures innovation and low prices over the long term."

Vermont is already composed of small communities with distinct character that draw in tourist dollars and create a personalized environment that enhances quality of life. Preserving this in the face of growing homogenization will ensure the state's status as a destination and refuge.

Local First Vermont's first phase of outreach is to coordinate with other organizations of like mind and mission, to avoid duplicating efforts and enhancing the collective effect. "We want to broaden the discussion beyond food to include retail, service, medical, banking, insurance, restaurants," Morrow says, "to have thinking local be a part of everyone's lives."

Ongoing, Local First Vermont will spread awareness of the network with window decals identifying member businesses, and teach consumers to look for the Local First Vermont logo when shopping. Morrow explains, "We give member businesses the talking points and materials that will lay the groundwork for word-of-mouth advertising."

As the organization grows, he plans to market Local First Vermont through radio and print media, and expand the collateral materials to include posters, bookmarks, and newsletters. A nine-member steering committee guides the campaign.

Businesses wanting to join must be based in Vermont, privately held with more than half the owners living in Vermont, and able to make all decisions independently. Membership starts at \$50 per year. Details and an application are available on the Website (www.localfirst-vermont.org), which includes a searchable database of members as well as links to resources, events, and information about allied organizations.

The site also contains a collection of economic impact studies that quantify the benefits of locally focused economies.

"With Local First Vermont, I'm hoping to make an impact on an issue I care about that resonates with Vermonters," Morrow says. "I'd like to see our communities strengthened and prevent some of the erosion that is taking place." □

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