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Architect's Business Promotes Use of Reclaimed Building Materials



by Tracy Ostroff

Community Forklift—operating with a small and dedicated team since November 2005 just across the Washington, D.C., border in Edmonston, Md.—is a nonprofit business at the crossroads of many issues dear to Schulman's heart. A wholly owned subsidiary and limited-liability company, Community Forklift is an offshoot of a successful deconstruction job training program run by parent organization Sustainable Community Initiatives. That program helped underemployed city residents gain basic construction skills by dismantling (not demolishing) wood and masonry buildings. Lacking space for the reclaimed goods, the nonprofit put its job training programs on hold to direct its resources toward developing the retail outlet.

Spreading the word

Since its opening last fall, Community Forklift has experienced a steady increase in business, largely stemming from word-of-mouth referrals and posts to reuse-minded listservs. Community Forklift is working to increase sales and reinvest in the business to develop a market for affordable building materials to redevelop and revitalize distressed neighborhoods in D.C. Community Forklift is also dedicated to promoting community-based sustainability initiatives and developing training, job, and career opportunities for low-income residents.

The enterprise also fulfills another mission: environmental sustainability. "One of the greenest things one can do as a designer is to specify used materials, because you are automatically inhibiting a new product from being manufactured," Schulman

says. Community Forklift [<http://www.communityforklift.org>] is open Thursday through Saturday, with donation pickups scheduled for Tuesdays.

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Consider reuse for special projects

"Architects are a smart bunch, and I'm proud of the AIA for having stuck with its interest and focus on sustainability for so many years," Schulman says. "But I still meet architects who do not understand there is a huge difference between recycling and reusing." He points to studies that document that a product's extraction phase, whether harvesting or mining, is the most

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detrimental to human health and the environment. Schulman also notes the energy and costs that are added as the product is manufactured.

"Reuse is not for the faint of heart and, of course, is not going to be appropriate for every client for every project. In fact, in most new construction, reused building materials are not necessarily appropriate," Shulman says. "But architects do a lot of renovation work, small additions, and all kinds of things where they or their clients could strategically go and buy a nifty window from a reuse center like us. They also can come to a store to match a product already in the building."

Specify—and educate

Community Forklift is working to develop relationships with architects and already has two Washington-area firms that regularly purchase and donate goods, says Outreach Director Ruthie Mundell.

"Fifteen years ago I was beating my head against the wall trying to find clients interested in this kind of thing," says Schulman, who pursued sustainable design in his own architecture



firm before directing the nonprofit. "I do believe the American public is far enough along now where their architect, interior designer, or engineer can remind the client of these things and they will be receptive. Architects are in a position not just to specify, but to educate clients."

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One of the store's main services for architects, Mundell says, is that they can donate to get their clients a fair-market tax deduction, help them meet LEED™ standards, and be a part of a green building project. "And then, on the outgoing end, the do-it-yourselfers and the low-income folks are really able to buy a lot."

Diverse inventory

Customers can donate and buy lumber, roofing, flooring, masonry, siding, paint, plumbing fixtures, appliances, windows, insulation, doors, cabinets, radiators, hardware, trim, mantels, shelving, and mirrors. The store will soon carry a line of new green building materials. Schulman says one of the neatest donations he's received (and would love to get off his lot to make space for the University of Maryland's Solar Decathlon house) is a fully deconstructed 80-year-old, 1,100-square-foot log cabin.

How much does it cost?

Community Forklift sells new products at about 50 percent of retail value. Used materials go for 70 percent off retail. "There have been times where I have given somebody a price and they say, 'Oh, no, I can't pay that little.' People haggle both ways," Mendell says.

The formula is working for Community



Forklift's diverse clientele. During the opening week, Schulman reports, "a Hispanic laborer departed on foot with four 2x4s and was very happy with our prices. Then, right after him, a chief of staff for a senator bought a bunch of brick. She was also pleased." Later on, Schulman says, she donated building materials.

Reference:

For more information, donation guidelines, or materials in stock, contact Community Forklift: 301-985-5180 or visit their Web site, [www.community-forklift.com] Hours are Thursday-Saturday, 8 a.m.-4 p.m.

Mundell says the most requested items are:

- Ceramic floor tiles (homeowners)
- Reclaimed oak and pine wood flooring (homeowners and design firms)
- Radiators (for old homes, particularly for restorations)
- Decking (Mundell credits Long Fence for donating wood and composite decking).

At its grand opening in April, Community Forklift held a "Blessing of the Green Builders." They plan to make it an annual event.