

Firm turns trash into treasure

Old materials aid D.C. community

BY MIKE RUPERT
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After just a few months in existence, a new company specializing in collecting and then selling surplus and salvaged building materials at low prices is becoming a veritable treasure chest.

Community Forklift, based in Edmonston, Md., has huge oak tables donated from a Burberry clothing store, wooden doors from the Pentagon, cast-iron stoves and ornamental radiators.

But company President Jim Schulman, however, envisions much more than just collecting "neat stuff."

"Once we get this business on stable footing, our long-term goal is to boost job creation by helping chronically underemployed inner-city residents gain basic construction skills," Schulman said. "We see this growing to include artisans who can use the materials to create craft-type items to add value."

The company, which has four



Greg Whitesell/Examiner

Jim Schulman, president of Community Forklift, stands amid previously used hardwood flooring Thursday in his Edmonston, Md., warehouse.

full-time employees, is already beginning to fill its warehouse with used lumber, masonry, plumbing and electrical fixtures, finishes and hardware. Some materials that have been donated are brand-new and still in their shrink wrap.

"Nearly everything we have would have gone to the landfill," Schulman said, "which is really a tragedy."

Most of the surplus materials

are being sold at 50 percent of what they would cost at local retailers.

Salvage materials are sold for much less, he said. All profits are reinvested in the business to increase job training and other community revitalization projects in the east side of the District.

More than 50 U.S. cities, including Oakland, Calif., Portland, Ore., Austin, Texas, and Baltimore, have such used building materials stores;

TREASURE CHEST

- Company founded in November 2005
- A subsidiary of D.C.-based nonprofit Sustainable Community Initiatives
- Open Thursday through Saturday from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m.
- For address and more information, visit www.communityforklift.com

Habitat for Humanity chapters run them under the "ReStore" name.

But Community Forklift will not get into the homebuilding trade. All profits, Schulman said, will be reinvested in the business to increase job training and other community revitalization projects in the east side of the District.

Dan DeMocker, a contractor with Turner Construction, has donated products to Forklift and bought items for his own personal use. DeMocker said he recently donated a veneer and stone receptionist desk from a Time Warner office.

"The thing was worth probably \$10,000 and would have ended up in the trash heap," he said.

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D.C. ponders 'green' code

Community Forklift is currently focused on collecting surplus and salvaged materials from residential homes and buildings, but could soon find itself buried in donations from commercial sources.

The D.C. Council is weighing a change to city building codes that would require the construction and demolition of new buildings to be more environmentally friendly. A major component of the new standards, known as Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design, is specifying what to do with surplus materials and reusing any materials that can be salvaged.

Dan DeMocker of Turner Construction said the new standards are sweeping the nation and expects up to 70 percent of new construction will follow LEED benchmarks by 2009.

"I think [Community Forklift] is in the right place at the right time," DeMocker said. "[The company] is going to find itself swamped with commercial materials."

Mike Rupert