

Boston Herald

Politically correct treatment for junk PCs

Renewing our e-sources; Computers get new life via recycling; Goodwill boots up used computers

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Abstract:

Miles away, in a Goodwill store in Allston, two refurbished computers -demonstration models - sit near "gently" used clothing, yellowing books and housewares. Through a program called "The Works," done in partnership with the Notre Dame Education Center in South Boston, older but upgradable computers are refurbished and loaded with new software, including Internet browsers and Microsoft Works. They are sold for \$295 and \$395 depending on capabilities and even come with a 90-day warranty (other Goodwill electronics are sold "as is").

Goodwill is among the groups designated by the state Department of Environmental Protection as sites for collection of old computers and TVs. The charity is part of a recycling infrastructure set up to help municipalities handle the growing glut of TVs and discarded electronics. In 2000, Goodwill received nearly 3,000 computers and TV monitors; about 600 computers were refurbished and sold, [Anya Frost] said.

Full Text:

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By now (maybe) the new computer you got for the holidays is humming. The old computer, which looked wicked cool three years ago, takes up closet space. It still works, but, man, it's OLD.

Of course, you know (or you should) that you can't simply dump the old clunker on the curb. Last April, Massachusetts became the first state in the nation to ban CRTs - the cathode ray tubes in computer monitors and TVs - from landfills to keep lead and other toxins out of the environment.

You speculate that your old computer might not even be good enough for a charity deduction. But your old workhorse may have a second chance at life, either as a refurbished computer sold for a discount or recycled into a new CRT, new copper plates or pothole filler.

Meet Dick Peloquin, owner of **ElectroniCycle** and a player in a complex network of public and private partnerships spurred by the state's CRT ban. Peloquin, a longtime TV repairman and tinkerer, runs one of two companies under contract with the state to recycle computers.

Amid the roar of smashing glass, ripping metal and crunching plastic in his Spencer facility, Peloquin points out a pile of wood torn from old TVs, just about the only material he CAN'T recycle.

"This is true recycling," he said, showing off boxes of broken glass from monitors, destined to be melted and remodeled into new CRTs. He has crates of plastic, torn from casings, that will be crushed and mixed with concrete for building material. Circuit boards will be stripped for the copper, and keyboards will be "demanufactured" to salvage usable parts.

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"It helps people with limited income to buy computers - (bridging) the digital divide," noted Anya Frost, spokeswoman for Morgan Memorial Goodwill Industries Inc. "And it provides general income for Goodwill."

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Peloquin estimates he gets about 20,000 pounds of electronics material every day. Much of that comes from some of the 254 Massachusetts communities that have received DEP grants to support electronics recycling programs. Programs vary - Cambridge, for example, will pick up computers at the curb for free; Boston will pick up monitors for free but you must make an appointment (call 635- 7574). Others charge a \$10 to \$20 pickup or drop-off fee at transfer stations.

For the fiscal year ending June 30, the state paid \$200,000 to cover recycling costs; thus far this year, it has paid \$300,000, said Brooke Nash, branch chief of the municipal waste reduction program, adding, "So the stuff is really coming in."

That's good news to Peloquin, who hopes to expand ElectroniCycle. He's now building a loading dock with plastic-enhanced concrete - some blocks may even contain plastic that he recycled.

Or - who knows? - they may have material recycled from the computer that once sat in your closet.