

NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Rutgers Saves Goods Destined for Landfills and Aids Local Communities

New Brunswick, NJ – Every spring at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, departing students discard thousands of pounds of trash and used goods as they move back home or into summer housing. Much of this material is in good or new condition, but students simply do not have room to store or transport it. In past years, nearly all of these items went to the Middlesex County landfill, with the exception of what local Dumpster-divers salvaged.

This spring, however, Rutgers is putting into play a new program called Rutgers Recovering Our Resources. The plan is to begin diverting these materials away from the landfill. From May 12th through the 15th, about 20 volunteers stood outside university housing facilities and Dumpsters collecting any usable items that were about to be thrown away. The most common items recovered were clothing, televisions, lamps, carpets, and kitchenware, as well as hundreds of different small items.

Volunteers held several “sorting parties” to organize the hundreds of pounds of usable items donated by departing students. The majority of items collected will be stored during the summer months and sold at a large rummage sale during the beginning of the fall semester, with any remaining items to be donated to charity or recycled. Some items have already made their way into the local community. Non-perishable foods were given to Rutgers Against Hunger, a program that collects food and monetary donations for local food banks. Bicycles were given to the New Brunswick Bike Library, which helps local residents and students to build and repair their own bicycles. Broken electronics are being recycled in an environmentally sensitive manner to avoid adding lead and other toxic substances to landfills.

Diverting these materials away from landfills saves the university in disposal costs and extends the useful life of the Middlesex landfill. It also allows students and local residents the opportunity to purchase low-cost clothing and furnishings this fall, a valuable resource in an uncertain economy. By recycling items, vast amounts of energy and materials are saved, and students are given an opportunity to think the life cycle of consumer goods while contributing to the local community.

The Rutgers Recovering Our Resources program was initiated by Albert Bozenmayer, a Rutgers graduating senior and a volunteer with the Solid Waste Resource Renewal Group (SWRRG), and Priscilla Hayes, director of the SWRRG, a unit of Rutgers New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station. The initial idea came from other universities that have reuse programs, but Rutgers has put its own stamp on the idea. Bozenmayer and Hayes spent many volunteer hours

during the summer and fall consulting with multiple Rutgers departments in order to plan and prepare for the program this spring.

“We started by talking to the new campus deans, the housing office, and the facilities department,” Bozenmayer said. “People said they had been waiting for years for a program like this, upset all this time about all the perfectly good items going in the trash.”

The program has brought together an enormous team of people from many departments, including University Facilities, Rutgers Housing and Residence Life, Academic Engagement and Programming, campus deans from the Office of Undergraduate Education, the Office of Student Life, and the Department of Transportation Services.

“This really brought out the best in cooperation from all our departments, and drew on the strengths and resources we already had,” Hayes said. “This made it possible to start something ambitious even in a tight budget year.”

University Facilities was able to provide planning and implementation help, as well as trucks and university-approved drivers. Housing suggested the best collection locations and gave additional assistance during the collection event. Campus deans provided money to pay Bozenmayer to coordinate the event, continuing through the summer into the fall rummage sale. Academic Engagement and Programming provided Chris Catching, a liaison who arranged help with designing a logo, posters and other media outreach. Student Life arranged to list the event as a volunteering opportunity for students and the greater Rutgers community. Residence Life and Housing publicized the event in residence halls. Transportation Services made arrangements for the placement of storage containers and collection trucks.

Vital additional help came from Eric Bierman of Export Transport Company, Inc, a member of Rutgers’ Institute of Marine and Coastal Sciences’ advisory board. His company donated three giant shipping containers to protect the donated items and the volunteers as they sorted them.

“I was impressed by the passion the planners had for this event,” Bierman said. “I just felt I had to help them make this a success.”

The sorting is being done under Bozenmayer’s watchful eyes, and volunteers are being rewarded with credits toward items they would like to buy. Over the summer, Bozenmayer and Hayes will call on the participating departments to help them get the word out to returning and incoming students, and to develop excitement for the fall sale.

About the Solid Waste Resource Renewal Group

For over 10 years, the SWRRG at the Rutgers New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station has provided leadership and coordination in innovative waste reduction, green purchasing and recycling of food waste, computers, fluorescent light bulbs, mercury-containing devices and waste paint. Through the only New Jersey-wide food residuals recycling initiative, SWRRG has brought together waste generators, recyclers and local government to find optimal ways of diverting food waste away from landfills and into the production of energy and soil amendments, which are vitally needed in the state and adjoining region. The group has provided research and outreach to entrepreneurs, generators and other stakeholders.