

WASTE & RECYCLING NEWS

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From trash to treasure

Solid waste district operates first publicly owned resale store

By Megan Greenwalt

BOSTON — “One man’s trash is another man’s treasure” certainly rings true for residents in the Monterey Regional Waste Management District in California with its Last Chance Merchantile.

Opened in 1991, the resale store is one of the first publicly owned and operated in the municipal solid waste industry.

“In the 16 years since, the Last Chance has become legendary among Peninsula residents for great deals, unusual treasures



Lindenthal

and for promoting a strong reuse ethic in the community,” said Jeff Lindenthal, public education and recycling manager for the Monterey Regional Waste Management District. He spoke about using Facebook as a marketing tool for the store during Wastecon 2010, held at the Boston Convention & Exhibition Center Aug. 15-17.

The only other similar program Lindenthal said he is aware of is through the Delaware Solid Waste Authority, but he said he believes it may have been discontinued or closed.

According to Lindenthal, the LCM is funded entirely by revenue collected from sales and electronic waste recycling.

“Sales have been increasing each year for the last 10 years and totaled \$689,000 in fiscal year 2009-10,” he said. “For many years, LCM operations were funded through sales and supplemented with revenue from landfill tipping fees.”

The building itself is located at the entrance to the Marina, Calif., landfill. Lindenthal said items are donated and reusable goods are salvaged by district staff on the MRF tipping floor.



Opened in 1991, Monterey Regional Waste Management District's Last Chance Merchantile is one of the first publicly owned and operated resale stores in the municipal solid waste industry. The building is located at the entrance to the Marina, Calif., landfill. Lindenthal said items are donated and reusable goods are salvaged by district staff on the MRF tipping floor.

“Items are priced to sell. The staff has years of experience pricing routine items, and they regularly consult online sources such as eBay for more unusual and valuable items,” Lindenthal said.

Reusable household hazardous waste items such as paint, garden products and cleaners are available free with a limit of 10 items per day.

“This is one of the ways we keep costs down in our HHW program and enable products to be used for the purpose intended,” he said.

Lindenthal said the LCM’s success comes from “building the program slowly and somewhat organically over the years.”

The district has been applying creative problem solving to salvaging and reuse programs for more than 50 years, he said.

“As early as Dec. 22, 1953, the MRWMD board of directors approved a motion to salvage cardboard from incoming loads of refuse,” Lindenthal said. “Following this early policy to reduce waste and conserve landfill capacity, the district in 1971 allo-

cated \$5,000 for a study to determine the feasibility of recycling or salvaging useful materials from solid waste.”

Shortly thereafter, the district began to allow customers to donate items for salvage, and employees were authorized to salvage at the landfill with recovered materials auctioned off once a month.

Over the years, the auctioneer could not keep pace with the increasing flow of reusable goods spared from disposal, according to Lindenthal.

Currently, the store is open 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday and 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Saturday. All of the proceeds are used to maintain operations, Lindenthal said.

“The store has become legendary in the local community and serves as a goodwill ambassador for the district,” he said. “The LCM Facebook page has more than 1,100 fans and receives a lot of positive praise.” ■

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