

## **Local Firms Show Green**

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Sunday is the annual observance of Earth Day, but reducing human impact on the environment is a daily effort for some Colorado Springs business owners.

The idea of elevating junk to a green status led former Apple executive Greg LaPorte two years ago to start a local franchise of 1-800-GOT-JUNK?

Yes, that's really the name of the company that in nine years has grown to 310 franchises and an estimated revenue of \$160 million this year.

Hauling away unwanted stuff — furniture, appliances, mattresses, yard waste, clothes and sundry items — with a professional and Earthfriendly flair is enough of a new twist on an old idea to attract customers, LaPorte said.

Instead of dumping items in a landfill, the company recycles paper, metal scraps, landscaping waste, building materials and other goods workers collect from people cleaning up homes and offices.

Merchandise that still has life and could be used by a charity or sold at a thrift store gets donated to various agencies in town.

The extra effort, LaPorte said, isn't more expensive because reducing the volume dumped at a landfill reduces the business cost. Money his crew of five makes from selling recycled scrap metal gets pooled and used for an employee perk, such as tickets to a ballgame.

LaPorte, who once headed Apple's U.S. sales and marketing operations in Silicon Valley, can't help but run his small franchise like it was a large corporation.

Employees wear clean uniforms, receive training, adhere to customer satisfaction standards and are taught marketing techniques. A favorite is standing in a public spot next to a company truck, wearing blue wigs and holding signs promoting the service. For generating new business, workers are entitled to daily profit sharing, LaPorte said.

"It's like they get a little MBA degree from working here and also learn about helping the environment," he said.

The next step: converting the company's fleet to run on biodiesel fuel.

"The nice thing is you can still have a profitable business and be environmentally concerned in the way you run it," LaPorte said.

The Warner family adds another word to the phrase, “reduce, reuse, recycle.”

It’s re-ink, which describes the work of the locally owned franchise.

Rapid Refill Ink, formerly JetEx Office Products, has been recycling and reselling ink and laser toner cartridges since 1992, when there were only two ink jet cartridges on the market.

“Now there are over 1,000, and many individuals and businesses aren’t aware they can be reused,” said Josh Warner, store manager.

But the idea of swapping a spent printer, copier, fax machine or laser toner cartridge for one that’s been cleaned and professionally refilled — instead of buying a new one — is catching on. Warner expects nearly half a million in sales this year at the family’s original store at 17 N. Circle Drive. A second location that opened at 308B S. 8th St. in May should near \$150,000 in annual sales, he said.

Customers can save 30 percent to 50 percent by buying remanufactured cartridges, he said. Recharger Magazine estimates nearly eight cartridges are thrown away every second in the United States. Plus, each plastic toner takes 3½ quarts of oil to produce.

“We need to educate people that there is a choice — they don’t have to throw away and buy new all the time,” Warner said.

The stores adopt environmental consciousness throughout, having countertops made of compressed sunflower seed husks, compressed wheat walls and carpet made of recycled products, such as milk jugs.

Thomas Hanna, owner of Shades of Green Remodeling, lets homeowners pick the degree of eco-friendly changes they want to make in their homes. Choices range from the basic “mint,” which includes using energy-efficient light bulbs and nontoxic paints, to “forest,” a full-blown approach of passive solar energy and geothermal heating.

“People can go as green as they want to go,” Hanna said. “It’s a matter of changing your way of thinking to reduce energy use, waste and toxins in your home.”

A residential contractor for 18 years, Hanna switched to a green focus last year.

“After having children, we started looking at how the way we live affects our environment — what we eat, drive and have in our home,” he said.

Now, methods and materials Hanna uses while remodeling kitchens, bathrooms and basements protect the environment and improve indoor air quality. For example, Hanna chooses nontoxic materials for jobs, recycles leftover construction materials, controls dust levels and fumes and minimizes waste.

“Our homes have a big effect on the environment, and we can make changes that don’t have to be expensive,” he said.

Hanna will present eco-friendly tips for homeowners from 6 to 7 p.m. Wednesday at Whole Foods Market, 7635 N. Academy Blvd.