

THE TAMPA TRIBUNE

Rapid Refill Has Lots Of Liquid Assets

By ELIZABETH LEE BROWN, *The Tampa Tribune*

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CARROLLWOOD – Most customers come into Rapid Refill Ink toting an empty printer cartridge looking for ink. Chances are the ink depot will have the right color combinations. The new business on North Dale Mabry Highway carries more than 70 black ink formulas used to refill various makes and models of printers. They also have a slew of cyan, magenta and yellow ink for color printers. But getting an ink refill isn't like pulling in for a 10-minute oil change. Rapid Refill Ink sells rebuilt cartridges that have been cleaned, refilled and repackaged, ready to be popped into the printer.

"It's kind of like an exchange program," said owner Bob Giest. Giest of Westchase opened the inkjet and laser toner cartridges refill store in November at 10416 N. Dale Mabry Highway, about a half-mile north of Linebaugh Avenue. The storefront is the first in Hillsborough County. The store carries about 1,500 different inkjet and toner cartridges, he said.

Their business model is based on the idea of getting people to use recycled cartridges, thereby decreasing the amount of industrial-grade plastic. Nearly 2 billion cartridges end up in landfills worldwide each year, Giest said. A typical printer cartridge can be reused and refilled up to 10 times, and it can take up to 1,000 years for cartridges to biodegrade in a landfill, he said. When customers bring in empty cartridges, they get tossed into the store's recycling bin. Workers begin a multi-stepped refilling process that includes taking the cartridge apart, flushing the ink out, cleaning the thousands of pinholes in the printer head, letting the cartridge dry, refilling it with the manufacturer's specific ink formula combination, and repackaging.

The refilled cartridges cost 30 to 50 percent less than new ones, Giest said. He said the franchise is focused on being environmentally friendly, including the store's design. The store's counter looks like granite, but is made from compressed sunflower seed husks. A mural shows 60 endangered species. The wall slats are made of 100 percent wheat stock, and the carpeting is made in part from recycled milk containers.

The company began in 2002 in Portland, Ore., and is now based in Minneapolis.

RAPID REFILL INK

ADDRESS: 10416 N. Dale Mabry Highway

HOURS: 9 a.m. to 7 p.m. Monday through Friday; 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday

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