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No more throw-away society

Otterbein staff scours students' trash to find recyclables

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Michele Acker, right, looks for reusable items that Otterbein College students threw away with their trash on move-out day at the Westerville school. Acker organized about 30 faculty and staff members to scour the trash bins for still-usable items that can be used by charitable organizations.

Otterbein College professors and staff members tried asking nicely, stopping departing students before they pitched household items.

But when there was a question about what had landed in the trash, these diehard re-users went in to retrieve everything from half-used cleaning products to pencils.

"We'd rather not have to dive in," said Michele Acker, a psychology professor at the Westerville college, which had its final move-out yesterday.

After a student told Otterbein communications coordinator Jenny Hill that she wasn't throwing away anything reusable, Hill pulled out a pair of sandals and a cork board. Thirty volunteers spent the past three days scouring five trash bins on the campus. They recovered clothing, bedding, towels, toys, shelves, appliances, cleaning products, rugs and furniture.

"It is amazing what people do throw away and what people don't think is salvageable," said freshman Melissa Fults, who added things to a pile of reusable items.

Acker agreed, saying that a great find is a half-used jug of laundry detergent or a used bottle of shampoo.

"Some students are really happy to know things are reusable," she said.

Food collections are being donated to the Westerville Area Resource Ministry, furniture is going to Material Assistance Providers and everything else will go to All Westerville Area Residents Enriched, or AWARE.

As long as the food is still sealed, the recycling team will be able to donate it, Acker said.

"I have a son here and I think of all the things I buy him that he never opens," said Diane Ross, a staff member, as she poured a box of granola bars into the food bin.

Any clothing recovered is being laundered by the nursing faculty and librarians before being donated. School supplies will be sent to children in Somalia.

"Over the past five years we have taken all sorts of things out of Dumpsters," said Acker, who has been digging out reusable goods for five years but made the effort a faculty event this year. "It was the accumulation and seeing no one was doing anything about it."

By yesterday afternoon, one giant trash bin was only half-full. Acker said in previous years it would be overflowing by this time.

Otterbein is not the only college that has noticed the potential gold mine of move-out day.

Ohio State University is in the midst of its fifth Dump and Run program. After collecting reusable goods during move-out, Students for Recycling store them in a university warehouse and then have a large garage sale in the fall with some proceeds going to charities selected by the organizers. The other proceeds are given to student organizations that volunteer for the program.

OSU's program has diverted more than 60 tons of waste from landfills and donated more than 4 tons of food, said Stacey Renker, adviser to the recycling group.

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