

[October 12, 2007]

Nonprofit sells items from demolished mansions to benefit addiction therapy

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NORWALK -- Ever wonder what happens to all the old "stuff" when a mansion is renovated or a house is torn down to make way for a mansion?

In many cases the stuff --which is often practically new and in perfect working order --ends up simply being scrapped. It's a costly proposition for the owner, who has to pay pick-up and disposal fees. It's also costly for the environment as large items such as marble counters and refrigerators are dumped into already stressed landfills. Also, the wood from the discarded cabinets now need to be replaced by cutting down more trees.

Steve Feldman had seen enough.

Feldman, a recovering addict, was asked in 1999 to lead the fundraising efforts for All Addicts Anonymous, a 77-acre retreat center in the Catskills that Feldman said saved his life. He started his efforts asking for cash donations, but then he witnessed something in Greenwich that changed his thinking.

In 2001, he watched as the 10,000-square-foot estate of Farah Diba, the last Empress of Iran, was leveled.

"There was a sign that read: 'Demolition in Progress,'" Feldman recalled. "Then the home was gone."

Feldman instantly came up the idea behind Green Demolitions, which is now the major donation program for Recovery Unlimited, a nonprofit organization supporting addiction recovery programs.

Green Demolitions accepts "recycled luxury item" donations from estates and mansions, as well as retail stores and trade shows. It then sells them to

customers at a savings of 50 to 75 percent off what the items would cost brand-new.

Green Demolitions will open a Norwalk location at 19 Willard Road (off Westport Avenue) on Saturday and hold a grand opening celebration from 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. that day. The 11,000-square-foot showroom is a major expansion from its previous location in the Black Rock area of Bridgeport, which closed on September 30.

"All this was going to be thrown out in a Dumpster --or put in storage, which is the next worst thing because it will eventually be thrown out anyway," Feldman said as he looked over the merchandise filling the new Norwalk store. "People are renovating all the time. We've created a win-win for everyone.

"Donors get a tax donation for something they were going to throw out. They also get free pick-up, dismantling and delivery. A contractor would charge a lot of money for takedown and disposal," he added, saying an insured crew will pick up the donated items. "Consumers get a great price -- 50 to 75 percent off recycled luxury products. We're recycling things that have a lot of value. It benefits the industry professionals because, by bringing in Green Demolitions, now they can stay within a client's budget and perhaps do a kitchen and a bath instead of just a kitchen."

Feldman said the environment is another winner as his concept reduces not only the quantity of items going to a landfill, but also the energy it takes to get the construction items there. By recycling cabinetry, Feldman added, it reduced the demand for wood, therefore helping to preserve the forest.

Donated items for sale include entire kitchens, bathrooms, appliances, lighting, home decor, doors and windows, heating/air conditioning units, water heaters and historic gifts. Green Demolitions also recycles vehicles, jewelry, musical instruments, whirlpools and other items.

"Anything that's luxury, we can recycle," he said.

Feldman on Thursday pointed to a complete kitchen set displayed at the Norwalk store. "This would be \$100,000 or more if bought new," he said, pointing out the sub-zero refrigerator, oven, stove, wood cabinets and marble counters. "We'll ask \$30,000 or \$35,000."

A dark wood kitchen set Green Demolitions has for sale was used by Home Depot at a trade show. Feldman, the president of Green Demolitions, said he gets a fair amount of items from trade shows and retail stores. In fact, Green Demolitions is the national charity for the Kitchen & Bath Industry Show and

Conference.

Green Demolitions has two other locations: one in Bethel, N.Y., near the site of the original Woodstock, and one in eastern Pennsylvania.

But Feldman doesn't want to stop there. He has set lofty goals for himself and Green Demolitions.

"I want to be the largest employer of recovered addicts, and I want to top \$1 billion in charity raising," he said. "This [Green Demolitions] is a self-sustaining form of fundraising, without have to ask for money."

To reach Green Demolitions, or to inquire about donating items, call 203-561-3372.

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