

Old Gizmos Are Recycled Into Profits



Lee Brim considers recycling possibilities for a laptop computer in the technical department at Creative Recycling Systems in Tampa.

TAMPA FIRM SNAGS DEAL FOR COUNTY'S CASTOFFS

By RICHARD MULLINS
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TAMPA — Corey Hockensmith stands as the last line of defense to keep Tampa Bay's obsolete electronics from the landfill.

Surrounded by 20-foot-tall stacks of old computer monitors, bins of tangled surge protectors and piles of cast-aside laser printers, Hockensmith quickly sorts what can be resold from junk destined for disassembly and meltdown.

"All the electronics come through me," says Hockensmith, who runs the "Triage" department of Creative Recycling Systems Inc. of Tampa. Looking around the 30,000-square-foot facility full of electronics, he said "I'll fill 48 pallets a day for shipment."



Kristof
Expects big growth in electronics recycling business

Hockensmith's job is about to get much busier.

CRS already collects consumer electronics for Pinellas County residents, largely through popular collection days at Home Depot stores. Now, CRS has won a contract from Hillsborough County to offer free collections at county solid waste sites the first three Saturdays of each month.

"Fifteen years ago, everyone was throwing all their electronics away in the trash, and there was not that much of it," said Jim Kristof, general manager of CRS. Now the average home contains far more electronics. "I can guarantee almost everyone has a few old cell phones in a drawer somewhere, and there could be 300 million obsolete PCs by 2007."

Saving a fraction of Tampa's electronics from the landfill would be an improvement, Kristof said.

For example, the average computer monitor weighs 30 pounds and contains six pounds of lead, mainly in the leaded glass tube. A similar size TV has twice as much lead. There also are fire-retardant chemicals in the plastic and precious metals in the microchips.

Collecting and handling those electronics has also become lucrative for CRS.

The company estimates it processed 100,000 computer monitors and 25,000 televisions last year, which



Tribune photo by C. I. McBRIDE

Computer units once the cutting edge and now considered landfill clutter await disassembly as recyclers harvest precious metals from their circuits.

translates to more than 4 million pounds of raw materials.

Reusable electronics such as cell phones can be resold or donated to charities. Obsolete electronics with working parts, such as microchips, can be resold to electronics makers. Broken electronics, such as old TVs, can be sold to scrap material processors that separate the glass, plastic and metal for resale.

In 2000, the same year CRS won the Pinellas County contract, CRS posted sales of about \$1.5 million. Last year, the privately held company's sales grew to \$3.5 million. Earnings were

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People now expect recycling events.

RECYCLING SCHEDULE

All collections are from 8 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. the first three Saturdays of the month at Hillsborough County solid waste locations.

- ◆ Every 1st Saturday, Solid Waste Management's Northwest Facility, 9805 Sheldon Road.
- ◆ Every 2nd Saturday, Solid Waste Management's South County Facility, Powell Road, 1/4 mile north of Big Bend Road and U.S. 41 South.
- ◆ Every 3rd Saturday, Solid Waste Management's East County Facility, County Road 579, 1/4 mile north of Interstate 4, Exit 10.

COMPUTER CASTOFFS

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not disclosed. Employment has grown from 20 to more than 40 during that time.

Much of that higher volume came from a successful collection program in Pinellas County.

"Our volumes really picked up last year," said Deborah Bush, solid waste program supervisor for Pinellas County. "Our mobile events at a Home Depot, on average, attracts 800 people in a five-hour period. People come to expect it now."

In past years, CRS might send a small truck and two staff members to a Home Depot event. Now they require half a dozen people and a semi-tractor trailer.

At the same time, the cost Pinellas County must pay for recycling is falling, mainly because the value of raw materials is rising worldwide.



Tribune photo by CLIFF MCBRIDE

Scott Fulp wheels a pallet loaded with recently collected obsolete computer equipment into a warehouse.

Several years ago, Pinellas County paid recyclers 25 cents a pound to process a small television and 30 cents a pound for computer monitors, Bush said. Now the county pays 18 cents a pound for TVs, monitors and nothing for electronics, such as laptops, telephones and VCRs.

"This industry is metamorphosing right now," said Peter R. Muscanelli, president of the

International Association of Electronics Recyclers, based in Albany, N.Y. Commodity prices are higher, making scrap more valuable. And, "there's a lot more awareness in the public, in government, in the business community that their electronics need to have an end-of-life solution."

There are few statistics about the industry, Muscanelli said, but his organization estimates there may be 400 U.S.-

"There could be 300 million obsolete PCs by 2007."

JIM KRISTOF
General manager of CRS, on the growth of home electronics

based electronics recyclers worldwide with industry sales of \$700 million. The electronics recycling market could grow its capacity by four to five times in the next decade, he said.

CRS, for one, plans further expansion.

The company is leasing property east of Tampa for a "demanufacturing" and sales site, where usable electronics are disassembled and resold, freeing a company site in Tampa to focus on distribution.

"We're going to need the space," Kristof said.

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