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Green and Greener, Reuse is not a four letter word

Dave Rochlin and Katy Foreman

Dave: There are "three Rs" of living more sustainably: reduce, reuse, and recycle. With the economy continuing to migrate south faster than a Canadian goose in November, reuse seems to be getting some much-deserved attention as a money saver.

Katy: I wish reuse got more attention as a planet saver! Less trash in landfills, and less manufacturing, shipping, and packaging. Aside from not using stuff at all, it's the best everyday way to help save the planet.

Dave: I admit that I used to think of 'reuse' as mostly a financial decision ... like buying a used car instead of a new car because it is cheaper. But I changed my thinking after visiting a friend's newly built house. The hardwood floor was unbelievable, and as it turned out reused -- from the floor of the Philadelphia Stock Exchange. They got history, uniqueness, and incredible quality, along with ecological benefits. Reuse can actually be cool.

Katy: Absolutely! My favorite thing about reuse is that I always wind up with something cooler than I could have gotten from the mall. Recently, I wanted to rid my kitchen of all things Teflon and found three vintage enameled cast iron pots at the Wayside Inn Thrift Shop in Lafayette. Grand total of \$17, no "Made in China", no crazy packaging, and they're super durable. I was so happy!

But reuse can be worked into even more routine purchases. Buying used books saves trees and energy, too. The Lafayette Bookstore and Canetti's are great sources, as are the local Friends of the Library book sales, or even opting for a used copy on Amazon or Powells.com. I also like visiting the upscale clothing consignment shops in Walnut Creek (Labels and Main Street Rags). I'm sure most people consider them as a way to save cash, but I love that they're reducing waste and manufacturing. My latest reuse idea is swapping magazines with my neighbor. She and I enjoy similar magazines but have different subscriptions. We just leave past issues on each others' porches.

Dave: Reuse also means being a giver as well as a consumer. Remodeling? Let your neighbors know that you are going to have some extra building materials, or make sure your contractor arranges to donate the 'tear out' materials. Tim Mascheroni, whose firm Mascheroni Construction does a lot of remodeling work in Lamorinda, recommends The Reuse People, which allows you to actually take a tax deduction while giving your old materials new life.

Katy: Urban Ore in Berkeley is another fantastic place to both donate and find reusable materials. They have used wood, marble, old fixtures, antique fireplace mantles, anything you can imagine. I found some replacement doorknobs from the 40s that matched the others in my house there.

Dave: When you are done with kids' clothes, toys and furniture, you can always find some else to use them, assuming they are still in good shape. We were thrilled to pass on some of our baby furniture to friends with newborn twins...it was great to know that they were getting another go 'round. In Moraga, there is a kids clothing swap on the first Thursday of every month (contact Bev at bali42@yahoo.com for details). We even have a massive bucket of Legos that a neighbor brought over when our kids were younger, and theirs were heading out to college. I believe that Legos, along with cockroaches, can survive a nuclear holocaust, so it's nice to keep them in use.

Katy: Given that your kids are six feet tall now, it might be time to pass those

Legos on to another generation. There are lots of ways to market your unwanted stuff. I've gotten rid of couches and beds (probably the two most challenging giveaway items) on Craigslist, and even found a taker for a roll of bubble wrap on Freecycle. I just left it on the driveway and the person came and got it while I was at work. The UPS Store on Mt Diablo Blvd will take back Styrofoam shipping peanuts. Just bring them in a bag and they'll reuse them for another shipment.

Dave: Speaking of free, we are planning a free movie event at the Rheem Theater on March 12th, to celebrate the launch of www.ClimatePath.org, and in conjunction with our friends who put on the monthly Green Rheem Film night. Please email info-at-climatepath.org for details, if you'd like to join the party!

Katy Foreman is a committed environmentalist who lives in Lafayette, and Dave Rochlin is a lazy environmentalist who lives in Moraga. Together they operate ClimatePath, a website helping individuals and businesses reduce their carbon footprints by offsetting and conserving in the ways that are right for them. ClimatePath is on the web at www.climatepath.org

Reach the reporter at: info@lamorindaweekly.com

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