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Freecycle, a Sustainable Way to Pass Along The Goods

By *Sophie Braccini*





Craig Isaacs with his Freecycle barbecue Picture courtesy of the Isaacs family

Becoming a member of Freecycle is easy; so is using it, and you don't have to own a bicycle. Freecycle stands for free recycling -- all you need is anything cluttering up your home that would be better off with someone who might be able to put it to good use.

"I wanted to find a way to get rid of things, but be sure that it could be re-used by someone who would really appreciate it," says Erin Hull, a Lafayette mom who's been using the free service for a year, "finding a local group where people offer and/or grab stuff for re-using them was just perfect."

The Lamorinda group of free recyclers is a spin-off the original association that was founded 5 1/2 years ago in Arizona by Deron Beal. At the time, he was working with a small non-profit organization, RISE, which provides recycling services to businesses. He watched perfectly re-usable items being thrown away and looked for a way for non-profits to get access to it for free. Beal sent out the first e-mail announcing the Freecycle Network(tm) to 30 or 40 friends and a handful of nonprofits in Tucson, Arizona. "As a result, we are currently keeping over 500 tons a day out of landfills," he says on his website, "this amounts to five times the height of Mt. Everest in the past year alone, when stacked in garbage trucks." The original cause of helping non-profits get what they need for free is still one of the main uses of the service.

The motivation is the same for the owner/moderator of the Lamorinda group, Ken Dreyfuss. The goal of Lamorinda Freecycle is to reduce waste in Lafayette, Moraga, and Orinda by connecting individuals who are throwing away goods with others who are seeking them. "A lot of non-profit groups are accessing our site," says Dreyfuss, "teachers, schools, and even a cat group, among others, are getting some of what they need on Freecycle."

Craig Isaacs of Lafayette, who has been using the group for years, agrees, "I've seen a lot of non-profits on the site, school teachers who need stuff for their class, boxes of crayons, scissors," he said, "and once I happened to have many of them; it's a great system." Isaacs remembers giving a dog kennel to the SPCA, and many other things to individuals as well. "I've given away a computer hard drive, Mac books, I gave away a video player, a basket ball hoop, things we don't need anymore and someone else could. This is a break in the buying cycle we are caught in." Isaacs has also acquired items on Freecycle, "the favorite thing I got is a barbecue, and it's the best barbecue!" he says.

To make sure that the network runs smoothly and commercial free as it grows, the role of the moderator is key. "I check the messages daily," says Dreyfuss, "I try to control the content, and accept new members."

Dreyfuss says he does not have to intervene very often. "Sometimes I have to remove messages that propose the reselling of things, which is not the purpose of the group," he notes, "no money is ever involved." The moderator can delete messages, and ban a person from the group; Dreyfuss remembers having done this only three times in five years.

Hull continues to use the service with a sense of usefulness, "I gave a full box of play-dough tools for toddlers to someone who needed it for her nephew," she says, "it is very useful for artists as well, who need things that I would see as garbage, like broken tiles, for someone's garbage is someone else's art."

Some of Hull's friends told her that they were a bit wary of leaving things on their porches; Hull herself has sometimes delivered or agreed on a pick-up place. Isaacs has people come to the site of his Lafayette business. "Check the safety tips and rules that are posted on the web site," says Isaacs, adding that he never heard of any issue arising from his network. For more information, go to the web site: freecycle.org, and the Lamorinda group: [//groups.yahoo.com/group/LMFN-Lafayette-Moraga-Orinda/](http://groups.yahoo.com/group/LMFN-Lafayette-Moraga-Orinda/).

More Free Recycling in Moraga

Beverly Harper, a Moraga mother of three boys ages 3, 5, and 7, organized a different sort of free recycling event last month. "I've been focusing on ways to help out people in our community with this whole financial crisis that we're in right now," said Harper, "I decided that it was getting ridiculous for all of us to be spending money on great quality kids' apparel when putting groceries on the table and paying the mortgage should be our priorities."

Clothes that are outgrown in what seems like weeks, shoes worn once and cast aside, ski wear that sees snow a few times and then ends up in the Goodwill bag could be recycled right here where friends and neighbors can re-use it.

Harper contacted several friends and local organizations such as the Moraga Junior Women's Club, Moraga Valley Presbyterian Church's (MVPC) Mom's Council and the Lamorinda Mom's Club and asked them pull out their gently used kids' clothing items and bring them to MVPC, which donated space and tables for the event.

Harper estimates that 40 to 50 families came through and almost everything was gone by the end of the morning. There was a large amount of small clothing, from newborn to toddler, but there were also some great items in larger sizes including cleats and ski wear for young teens. "There was no need to bring something in order to take something," said Harper, "but I definitely encouraged people to partake, reminding them that this was set up to benefit all of us."

Harper is planning another event on March 12 from 9:00am-noon at MVPC. She is not opposed to people outside of the community participating, but she doesn't do any official advertising, just email and word of mouth. Harper can be reached at bali42@yahoo.com.

Reach the reporter at: sophie@lamorindaweekly.com

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