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## Buy Nothing groups offer random acts of kindness

By Diane Claytor



Nancy Hu, administrator for Buy Nothing Lafayette, with some of the hard-to-recycle items she'll continue collecting at Lafayette's Earth Day Festival on Apr. 28. Photo provided

because "we're not a community bulletin board or charity, we're strictly a hyper-local gift economy," their website explains.

Buy Nothing groups are, as noted above, hyper-local and intentionally kept reasonably sized. This makes it easier to build a community of neighbors who get to know each other by giving or asking - and then not having to drive 25 miles to receive their "gift." There are approximately 100 Bay Area Buy Nothing groups and three of those are in Lamorinda, one in each of the towns. Each group has its own administrator to help foster community, remind people how Buy Nothing is different than other social networking groups and encourage members to tell stories about what they're gifting or requesting.

A recent offer of pink and purple yarn prompted a response from a mom who said she'd love these "for our finger knitting crazy kid. Pink and purple happen to be her favorite colors." Or a post offering cumin and soy sauce was accompanied by an admission: "I don't even remember why I bought these. Tell me what you'll cook with them."

Leah Riggins and Carly Power Staublin started Moraga's Buy Nothing group last July. Riggins recruited Nancy Hu to be the admin for Buy Nothing Lafayette and Erin Brindley to administer the Buy Nothing Orinda group. There are currently about 300 members in both the Moraga and Lafayette groups and approximately 225 in the Orinda group. Riggins also is a regional administrator, where she serves as a resource and support for other Bay Area Buy Nothing administrators.

Hu took on the admin duties for Buy Nothing Lafayette because this group "combines two things I love: building community and reducing waste. It encourages face-to-face contact between the gifter and recipient. And," she added, "there's nothing more satisfying than giving away something that's no longer useful in your life" and knowing it will find a new home with someone else who needs and wants it.

"I especially like that people ask for little things," Riggins said. "It's not just the bigger items like a used crib or kids' shoes. It's the request for one shoe lace because one was lost, or a single binder clip needed for one purpose because, after all, who wants to buy a package of 10 if only one is needed."

Of course, the Buy Nothing groups are also about reducing trash and the ever-growing landfills needed to accommodate all that garbage. As the Buy Nothing website proclaims, "There truly is no 'away' when you throw things away. It all goes somewhere. Let's buy less, throw away less and share more."

To join your local Buy Nothing group, go on Facebook and search for Buy Nothing (your city/town name).

An unused designer wallet, discovered in the back of a drawer, was handed over - for free - to a mom whose college-age daughter had been coveting one, but couldn't afford it. A PBK rocking horse, well-loved by three grandkids who had outgrown it, was given, at no cost, to a grandmother whose grandson was just reaching the age to ride it enthusiastically. An abundance of lemons was shared with a mom whose daughter really wanted to open a lemonade stand. Used books, games, furniture and clothing, half-used packages of diapers, light bulbs, costume jewelry and candles all found new homes with neighbors, thanks to the popular Facebook group, Buy Nothing.

It's true what they say: "one person's junk is another person's treasure." And that's what Buy Nothing counts on; their model is to give you the opportunity to offer your neighbors something you no longer need or ask for something you do - at no cost to anyone.

Started in 2013 by two friends who created what they called an experimental hyper-local gift economy in their Washington state neighborhood, from that humble beginning, Buy Nothing has grown into a worldwide social movement with more than 500,000 members in 30 nations. As their website states, Buy Nothing rules are simple: "Post anything you'd like to give away, lend or share amongst neighbors. Ask for anything you'd like to borrow or receive for free. Keep it legal. Keep it civil." There is no buying or selling, no trading or bartering

## An Earth Day push

Nancy Hu has taken her interest in both building community and reducing waste considerably further than simply serving as the administrator for Buy Nothing Lafayette and encouraging neighbors to recycle items they no longer need or want.

A strong proponent of zero waste, Hu, a dentist at the Department of Veterans Affairs, laughingly said that "during the day I save teeth, at night I try to save the world." Recycling, climate change, and environmental issues have always been important to Hu, but having her own children strengthened her passion and made her realize she wanted to do more.

"I love using Buy Nothing as a platform to promote more zero waste practices," she said. And that's what she'll be doing during Lafayette's 14th annual Earth Day Festival on Sunday, April 28 from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the Lafayette Library.

Joining forces with TerraCycle, an organization that's "eliminating the idea of waste by recycling the non-recyclable," Hu will be collecting a variety of hard-to-recycle items, including toothbrushes, toothpaste tubes, electric toothbrushes/cords/heads, personal cosmetic packaging, baby food smoothie pouches, plastic bread-bag tags and even cigarette butts. She'll also be answering questions and offering suggestions on how we can all reduce waste.

For more information on items Hu will be collecting or for ideas on how you can do your part to practice zero waste, email Hu at [nchsu514@gmail.com](mailto:nchsu514@gmail.com).

Reach the reporter at: [info@lamorindaweekly.com](mailto:info@lamorindaweekly.com)

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