

2nd life for products

Continued from 1E

To create those end products, the company needs material, namely, garbage. And will pay for it. Penn State Behrend has signed up to become a collection center.

"We don't really look at this as garbage," said Ann Bolla Quinn, 51, a lecturer in the School of Science and director of Greener Behrend. "If we're getting paid 2 cents a bag, it's not garbage. We are very excited about setting this program up. We have gotten big boxes from Terracycle for the students and faculty to discard their wrappers."

Those wrappers and empty chip bags at 2 cents a pop, multiplied by the 4700 students who inhabit the campus, could potentially net the university hefty sums over time, with the money earmarked for green initiatives, she said. The idea, however, didn't come from the university. It came from a hungry student.

"I was eating a bag of Keebler cookies and was reading the package, which said turn this wrapper in to a good cause," said Amanda Stetz, a 20-year old sophomore. "There was a website on the wrapper, and so I went to it, and they had this whole upcycling company."

While Stetz admits that she had heard the phrase, it wasn't until she found the company that she understood the concept.

Growing up in a reuse-sensitive family, Stetz's mindset was already programmed to reuse such things as plastic water bottles and even empty margarine and butter tubs.

"I believe you should always reuse before you recycle," she said.

Reuse is nothing new to the arts community, as waste is something that most artists don't do well. Neither is reinvention.

"My husband, Steve, is a bass player, and I didn't like to see him throwing his old bass strings away," said Elena Logvena, 35, who two years ago started using the strings to create ornaments that eventually morphed into creating one-of-a-kind jewelry.

At a recent show at Glass Growers Gallery — which features the works of several artists who upcycle — Logvena presented a colorful canvas of her eclectic jewelry depicting Van Gogh's "Starry Night" made entirely from guitar-string necklaces, earrings and bracelets.

"I love that music was made with these pieces at some point in their lives," said the Erie entrepreneur and mother of two. "I love that I have given them second life."

Musical instrument strings have also inspired Elisa Guida, owner of La Petite Jeweler, in Erie, who started using them three years ago to create jewelry with a cause: to help those with breast cancer.

Guida is a two-time breast cancer survivor and uses her talents of 34 years as a custom jeweler to help others. She has collected donated, discarded guitar strings from notable regional, national and international musicians, bringing an atypical fan base for her jewelry creations.

But she wants to go bigger.

"I realized that if the big-time musicians



GREG WOHLFORD/Erie Times-News

Jeweler Elisa Guida creates jewelry from used guitar strings and uses the proceeds to help people diagnosed with breast cancer. Guida has received donated strings from many artists, including Carlos Santana, Jon Bon Jovi, Todd Rundgren and Donnie Iris bassist Paul Goll.



Elisa Guida

Her foundation's website, www.stringsforacure.com, boasts an assortment of jewelry, from pendants to rings to bracelets, made from donated used strings from guitarists.

The money raised from jewelry sales for the StringsforaCure foundation is used to purchase grocery, pharmacy and gas gift cards, as well as educational materials for people with breast cancer.

Funds are also used to help defray the cost of wigs. Guida's mission is to get more notable musicians to donate, which, of course, would mean larger donations to her foundation.

"I have my sights set on Bruce Springsteen, Sheryl Crow, Chris Daughtry, Melissa Etheridge and Paul McCartney," she said, adding, "And of course, Pat Monahan."

But not every artist is vested in famous garbage. Some will take just about anybody's throwaways.

"We collect everything with the attitude that we can use it all. It's artistic Dumpster diving," said Kelly Armor.

Armor has combined her passion with her study of folk instruments and built it into a career as director of education and folk arts at the Erie Art Museum.

"I have always been this way. It goes back to when I was five years old and was more into my sock puppet than my socks," said Armor, 46. "I am not really conscious

would come on board, it would really get things going," said Guida, 56. "Fans who love certain musicians want to own one-of-a-kind pieces made from their guitar strings, and in addition, they are helping those touched by cancer."



ROB ENGELHARDT/Erie Times-News

Amanda Stetz, 20, a sophomore at Penn State Behrend, shows one of the recycling bins on the campus. The university provides recyclable material for upcycle companies.

about it. I make stuff out of other stuff. It's called imagination."

Her ideas are endless: using PVC pipe to make African flutes, stitching old discarded bottle caps to a cutoff sock for an ankle tambourine and affixing bobby pins on scrap wood to make a kalimba, or thumb piano.

"Basically, we are committed to helping kids and adults think creatively," she said, referring to the educational component of her job at the museum where she also teaches classes.

While Sister Linda Romey, of the Order of St. Benedict, is hardly one to rifle through a garbage can, she never turns down a ripped or well-used pair of old jeans.

Romey gives new function to the fabric with the help of her loom.

"I take old jeans, rip them into strips and I use the strips to weave into the loom. Basically I am making a new fabric to

make computer bags, my latest inspiration," said Romey, 51. She sells her wares at the monastery gift shop in Harborcreek. Like Armor, she's a pack rat.

"I hate to throw things away that have another use. I am always looking for things that can be used for something different," she said. "I love thrift stores, flea markets, antique malls. I am forever picking up old handkerchiefs, pieces of lace and bits of fabric, old sweaters."

It's what she does with all of it that perches is at the heart of upcycling.

"I don't know what I am going to do," she said. "I don't know what it's going to turn into when I start. But I do know, inspiration always comes."

LENORE SKOMAL can be reached at lnskomal@aol.com. Her column appears Thursdays and you can read her blog at www.GoErie.blogs.com/news/writersblock.