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NEWS

Awaken the potential in discarded objects

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The old proverb "One man's trash is another man's treasure" essentially describes the principle behind the For Earth's Sake program (FES). A branch of the Marin Conservation Corps, the program was begun in 2000 with an objective of taking creative reuse and recycling to the next level and assisting schools at the same time.

The way it works is that people and businesses donate seemingly useless materials that would otherwise be thrown away to FES. All these donations are then given away again, but represented as desirable materials instead of trash. A large truck, filled with many boxes containing things such as paper, fabric, tile samples, soda bottle tops, plastic boxes, and fabric scraps is driven to various sites in Marin where teachers are encouraged to come and take whatever they want and however much of it they want. The materials

are mostly given to elementary and middle school teachers, who gladly use them for student art projects instead of buying expensive supplies at their own expense.

Jamie Yosha, who has been the supervisor of FES for three and a half years, describes it as combining beginning environmentalism with art and creativity. If children associate environmentalism with lectures and responsibility, it will forever have a negative connotation in their minds. Conversely, if they do a fun art project using recycled materials, it is more likely for them to be responsive and interested in environmentalism.

When new items come in from donors, Yosha says that FES tries to do as little as possible to modify them. It all depends on how a particular item is presented. Since most of the people who are looking for things to take are in a hurry, they don't like to sort through a mess of colored paper or a box of disorganized tile fragments. If things are neat and organ-



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ized though, it makes an apparent difference in how quickly things are taken.

However, if the donation is particularly unpopular and sits on a shelf for months, FES will try to "awaken the object to its potential." Yosha uses the example of a set of wooden posts about an inch in diameter and four feet in length that they had in stock. Because of their awkward size, teachers did not take them because they could not foresee any possible use in a project. However, when vol-

unteers for FES simply cut up the posts into one-inch long sticks, suddenly they were flying off the shelves. Sometimes, however, it does not turn out as well and some items do not get taken. Persevering though, FES will augment an item again and again and lives by the motto "Someone wants it somewhere."

"It's the reality of the business," said Yosha, "You can't take everything and some things will end up in the garbage. We just try to minimize that waste."