

St. Vincent de Paul Society of Lane County, Inc.
Eugene, Oregon USA
Recycling and manufacturing programs

Introduction

Established in Lane County in 1954, the St. Vincent de Paul Society of Lane County, Inc.'s (SVDP) mission is to "assist the poor and those in need of consolation, seeking out and utilizing any resource. Being mindful of the sanctity and dignity of all, any charitable work that advances those goals is within the mission of St. Vincent de Paul." The agency provides a variety of social service programs that help low-income people become self-sufficient. These programs include: emergency services/provisions (food, clothing, shelter, basic needs), affordable housing, vocational training/job placement and economic development projects through recycling. St. Vincent de Paul is the largest non-profit humanitarian agency in Lane County with 350 employees, over 950 units of affordable housing, five emergency service programs, and a Self-Sufficiency Department (serving difficult to place job candidates). Last year, more than 84,000 low-income, homeless and at risk individuals benefited from our outreach and services.

SVDP is also an internationally recognized leader in the field of waste-stream diversion and business development. The agency manages ten independent businesses, which are described below. All the proceeds of these businesses benefit SVDP's social service programs and are responsible for the significant growth we've seen in the past 25 years.

Thrift Stores

Retail thrift stores are the backbone of most St. Vincent de Paul operations, and Lane County is no different. We operate eight stores and a car lot. The stores provide over 100,000 square feet of retail space in Eugene, Springfield and Florence. They sell clothing, shoes, household goods, sporting goods, books, furniture imported from the United Kingdom, and products repaired or manufactured by SVDP such as appliances, mattresses and furniture.

Cars for a Cause

Used cars get new life at Cars for a Cause, SVDP's used car lot. Vehicles in working order receive minor repairs and are sold to people in the community, or donated to the local community college for use in their training programs. Non-working vehicles are sold for the scrap value. SVDP receives about 1000 cars per year.

Appliance/Freon/Propane Tank Recycling

Appliances repair has been an integral part of St. Vincent de Paul's mission since 1955 when simple repairs were made to donated units. Each appliance (refrigerators, freezers, ranges, washers, and dryers) carries a 90-day warranty. Appliances that cannot be repaired are recycled. Each machine is stripped of components such as copper, tin, steel, plastic, motors and compressors. The oil is removed in an environmentally-responsible matter. CFC's (ozone-depleted gases) are also removed and cleaned for resale. SVDP is the largest nonprofit recycler/reclaimer of Freon on the west coast. The agency recycles about 3,000 pieces a month.

Books

In small quantity books do not create a draw for serious shoppers. However, in recent years SVDP began accepting up to 200 tons of books a month for sorting and processing. Now most of our retail thrift shops have book sections with between 40,000 and 100,000 titles each. Books are categorized, organized, and displayed so that anyone can find the book they are seeking. Books are now the third-highest selling product in the thrift stores.

Woodshop

One of SVDP's first forays into social enterprise, the Woodshop was set up to use industrial off-cuts bound for landfill to create furniture that could be given away to low-income families or sold in the retail thrift stores. The product line includes dressers, bookshelves, plant stands, and many other items. A combination of recycled wood, melamine, and pine are used to create products. Staff endeavors to use even the smallest pieces of wood, turning them into gift items such as CD holders and gift boxes.

Mattress Rebuilding and Recycling

Mattresses are a nuisance in the waste stream because they take up lots of space in landfills and can create flammable air pockets. At SVDP mattresses and boxsprings are stripped of their components parts, including cotton, foam, wood and steel. Whenever possible the springs are retained and rebuilt into a new product. The remaining commodities are baled and shipped out for recycling. Between operations in Eugene, Oregon and Oakland, California SVDP recycles approximately 150,000 mattresses a year, making us the largest mattress recycler in North America.

EcoFiber

SVDP utilizes off-cuts from textile manufacturers to create products for our mattresses and for use in Dogma Dog Beds, a line of pet beds. Waste textiles are loaded into a garneting machine, which cards the fibers and creates a cotton or polyester "batt."

Aurora Glass

Aurora Glass creates architectural accents, gift products and custom awards from recycled window glass. Unlike glass bottles, window glass has few applications for recycling. SVDP melts the glass (85 tons a year) to a temperature of 2300 degrees Fahrenheit, colors it, and recasts it. The result is beautiful tiles, wind chimes, sun catchers, and many other projects. Consider Aurora Glass the next time you need an award! In addition, glass that cannot be melted in the furnace is tumbled to create a product for landscapes, florists, and gifts. www.auroraglass.org

EcoFire

SVDP melts partially burned candles that are donated to the retail stores and combines the paraffin with cotton pulled from recycled mattresses. The resulting product is a fire starter that can be used in camp fires and wood stoves. The product is long lasting, burns even in wet conditions, and has a pleasant smell.

Expanded Polystyrene (EPS)

SVDP is now Lane County's only source for recycling expanded polystyrene (commonly known by the brand name Styrofoam). A machine shreds the Styrofoam and compresses it into blocks. The blocks can be resold to manufacturers who create building products or fuel. Styrofoam peanuts are used at Aurora Glass or resold in our thrift stores. Within the first three months of operation this program received over 6,400 cubic feet of Styrofoam!