

LITTLE RED WAGONS FIND NEW PURPOSE

BY: JULIE PLUMMER – IWE AREA 5 RESOURCE SPECIALIST

Sometimes materials that the Iowa Waste Exchange works with have great appeal. Such was the case when a direct marketing catalog and internet retail company and Waste Commission of Scott County requested the assistance of Area 5 Resource Specialist Julie Plummer to find an alternative to the landfilling of 1,307 little red garden wagon kits. Consumer Product Safety Commission testing had shown some of the kit's components to have elevated lead levels, meaning the wagons could not be sold to the public, nor given away to the many people expressing interest in them.



Luckily, the wagons came unassembled, making it possible to separate out the lead-containing components: steel frames painted with lead paint, handle grips, and top covers, from the safe components: wheels, wooden wagon sides and bottom, and cover hoops. Julie contacted the Habitat for Humanity ReStore in Davenport, knowing that the wheels would be a great item for the Habitat ReStore to sell. ReStore Director Joe Ryan was eager to take the 5,028 wheels, which if sold at \$1-\$2 each, could bring in \$5,000 - \$10,000 in store revenue. ReStore revenue is used to finance construction of Habitat for Humanity homes in the Quad Cities area. And by finding a reuse opportunity for the wheels, the catalog retail company could save a portion of the nearly \$1,000 it would cost to dispose of the wagon kits in the landfill.



The creative mindset exemplified by the ReStore personnel and shoppers fits perfectly with the Iowa Waste Exchange's mission to give new value to waste. As Julie searched for ways to recycle additional wagon components and packaging, the ReStore thought up ways to reuse more of the safe wagon components, and developed a logistics plan for receiving, de-packaging, and separating out the wagon components. Three semi-loads of wagon kits made their way to the ReStore, where over twenty amazing volunteers spent a furious seven hours breaking down the wagon kits for store inventory, recycling, and landfill disposal. Wagon components that became ReStore inventory included the wagon wheels, wooden sides and bottoms, and the metal wagon cover hoops. One 40 cubic yard container of packaging cardboard was recycled through the Waste Commission of Scott County. Four roll-off containers of steel frame pieces were recycled through Alter Metal Recycling, resulting in another \$1,200 revenue for the ReStore. Out of the total wagon kit weight of 53,587 pounds (nearly 27 tons), only about 4 cubic yards of material was landfilled.

Wagon components continue to disappear off the ReStore shelves. ReStore Store Manager Erika Schmidt has constructed crates and bookshelves from the wagon sides and bottoms, to show the possibilities for their reuse. "The surprise favorite wagon component though", says ReStore Director Joe Ryan, "has been the metal cover hoops. They came in just at the right time for gardeners, who purchased them to use to construct protection for new plantings and create trellises for climbing plants." Joe adds: "When Julie said 5228 wheels, I didn't know what to think, but knew I needed to say YES! Our customers have plans and the wheels are rolling out of the store 4-8 at a time. This is fantastic

and a great partnership with the Iowa Waste Exchange! Julie has been a gateway to many items that were headed to the landfill. “

