

Submission for 1-16-06 Ann Arbor News "Your World" column:

If your New Year's resolutions include "de-cluttering" your life, you have many options besides the landfill:

Washtenaw County has created a guide that will help you find homes (e.g. charities and recyclers) for over fifty different types of materials, from art supplies to video tapes. For online access to the guide, type "Turning Trash into Treasure" into the search field at www.ewashtenaw.org.

For "one-stop giving," Recycle Ann Arbor's Reuse Center (www.recycleannarbor.org, 734.662.6288) takes a long list of items. But they can't take everything, such as broken items, baby strollers, and older computers. Which is where "Freecycle" comes in...

Freecycle(TM) is a great idea which has spread around the world since its creation in Arizona in 2003. Groups form locally, and by communicating over the internet, members post items offered or items wanted. They can offer any object that is free, and appropriate (e.g. no adult materials).

This non-profit, grassroots "gifting" movement is now in more than 50 countries, with a total of almost two million members. There are more than 125 different groups in Michigan-Ann Arbor's has over 4,000 members. To join a group in your area, go to www.freecycle.org.

Features of Freecycle(TM):

--Membership is free.

--Messages are moderated by volunteers-who screen out spammers-but the exchange process is arranged individually.

--Rather than receiving individual e-mails (the Ann Arbor group posts about 1,300 monthly!), you can view postings on their website, or you can opt for a single "daily digest" email.

--You can search the archives for items of interest. If you don't find what you're looking for, you can instruct FreecycleFinder to email you when a new item appears matching your search.

--FREE4ALL's are occasionally scheduled: gatherings of local members who bring their items on a specific date to a specific location-no selling or trading, all items are free. Individuals who have a lot to get rid of can have their own FREE4ALL at their home (good for getting rid of yard sale leftovers).

Recent posts on the Ann Arbor site include many looking for computers and their components, both working and broken. This is good news, because "e-waste" is a huge, and rapidly growing, environmental concern (dangerous toxins, such as lead, cadmium, barium, mercury, flame retardants, and PCB's, are released to the environment when they are landfilled or incinerated).

Another option for disposing of broken computers in an environmentally-responsible manner is the Washtenaw County Drop-Off Station on Ellsworth Road (there is a small charge--call 734.971.7400).

"Reuse" not only saves landfill space and keeps toxins out of the environment, it conserves the considerable amount of energy and resources required to produce new items: a worthy resolution!

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