

Finger Lakes ReUse volunteer fixes printers, fights waste

Written by Andrew Casler
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ITHACA — With a focus on environmental sustainability and a love for tinkering with technology, Finger Lakes ReUse volunteer Steve Pacenka refurbishes household printers that could otherwise be wasted.

Pacenka's work has helped Finger Lakes ReUse refurbish and sell 458 printers since April 2010. The center accepts many more printers each year, about 800, which are beyond repair and sold for scrap.

He volunteers at Finger Lakes ReUse on Saturdays, and Pacenka, of Ithaca, works part-time in Cornell University's Department of Biological and Environmental Engineering as a research support specialist.

Finger Lakes ReUse is a warehouse, shopping and educational center. The store accepts donations of used, unwanted goods and then sells them.

Pacenka said he likes to refurbish printers because it helps counteract the technology industry's tendency to waste. "I object to the deliberate creation of solid waste by planned obsolescence," Pacenka said.

Pacenka is passionate about fixing the printers which would otherwise be discarded, but he has to balance that with finding the most high value, and least labor intensive printers to refurbish.

Most of the time, he replaces ink cartridges and makes a few adjustments to the printers, and then he tests them to make sure they're fit for resale.

Getting the highest number of tested printers on Finger Lakes ReUse shelves is better than spending lots of time completing fewer, repair intensive refurbishes, he said.

"Many of the printers that we receive are in perfect working order except that they have run out of one of their ink cartridges," Pacenka said.

Buying a printer can be seen as akin to getting an ink subscription, Finger Lakes ReUse eCenter Executive Director Diane Cohen said.

"In my opinion, printers are vehicles to sell ink," said Cohen, a Trumansburg resident. "The printers are almost kind of a loss leader that they practically give away."

Pacenka goes through great lengths to make sure the printers are filled with ink when they're resold, and he works to refurbish the best-value printers, she said.

"I think if you factor in ink with the cost of a printer, then yes our printers are always more affordable than what you can get new," Cohen said.

Finger Lakes ReUse sold about eight printers each month in 2012, having sold 94 this year to date, Cohen added.

"He's a real asset to the community," said Finger Lakes ReUse eCenter Manager Michael Toutman, an

Ithaca resident. "He has a real enthusiasm for what he does and enjoys helping people out."