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## Editor's note

Consider a Hummer racing a bicycle. The Hummer may represent global warming and overflowing landfills. The bicycle could represent commuters who decide not to drive every day and individuals who refill their water bottles instead of replacing them. The small steps might feel insignificant, but even the most cynical environmentalist will tell you that they do matter.

This section heralds a new focus for the Portland Tribune and Community Newspapers. Each month we'll take a look at local people, businesses and organizations making our community . and therefore the world . better for us all. Also, in every paper, every week, additional stories will focus on sustainability.

Just paying attention is an important step. And we'll pay attention to you, so send your ideas. That, too, makes a difference. . Audrey Van Buskirk

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## Out with the old, in with the free

*Freecycle's online bulletin board can empty your closets — then fill them up again*

By JENNIFER WILLIS Issue date: Tue, Jun 13, 2006  
*The Tribune*

### **One man's junk is another man's treasure. That familiar adage is at the heart of the online Freecycle network.**

When I was getting ready to relocate to Portland from Virginia in 2004, I wanted to reduce my possessions by half. It was an ambitious plan. It was shocking how much stuff I'd amassed in the seven years I'd lived in my home, and there was no way I was hauling all that junk cross country.

I had several yard sales and made nearly daily donations to Goodwill, but I couldn't keep up with the massive purge.

So I turned to Freecycle.

Freecycle — which combines “free” with “recycle” — started in May 2003 in Arizona to reduce waste in downtown Tucson and prevent the surrounding desert from being overrun by landfills. Now with a network of more than 3,600 groups and 2.3 million members worldwide, this online service is open to individuals and nonprofits alike. Membership is free, by joining the Yahoo group through [www.freecycle.org](http://www.freecycle.org).

Freecycle's only rule: Everything must be free, legal and appropriate for all ages.

### **Linking givers and takers**

The Freecycle group in Richmond, Va., was pretty new, but as soon as I began posting to the online board, area members emerged who were happy to take my discards.

A young couple claimed my bed frame within a few hours of my posting. Another man who was building a patio cheerfully hauled away the stacks of bricks I had stored in the garage, and took my unwanted clothes dryer, too.

I quickly became a Freecycle cheerleader.

Freecycling couldn't be easier. If there's something you want to get rid of, just post it to the board; you get to choose who will be the “winner” of your item. If you're looking for something, post your need or respond to offered items. Cookbooks, children's games, plants, clothing, hardware, chances are someone has it sitting in a garage or basement — just as your unwanted items may be what a local family has been waiting and praying for.

For me, Freecycle was a sanity-saver. I connected directly with people who wanted what I had to give and made arrangements for pick up, rather than

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having to haul my stuff to a donation center. I found a Virginia husky rescue group and donated a dog crate and Dogloo. A grateful student took my futon, and didn't even blink at the duct tape used to repair where my husky had ripped into the mattress.

The night before the movers came, I still had a sleeper sofa and a bookcase to place. A quick e-mail to my local Freecycle ensured the items were gone quickly.

### **Stock up on stuff and karma**

In Oregon, Freecycle helped fill in the gaps. I hadn't thought I'd miss the Crock-Pot I'd unloaded back in Virginia, but I found a new one — new to me, anyway — offered by a lady here. She was excited to hear about my move, and we even exchanged stew recipes.

I picked up a mountain bike from a couple last fall. The husband was recovering from back surgery, so I offered free reiki healing in exchange. I've received gardening pots, stew bones, a box of romance novels and an exercise bike for my community's clubhouse.

In May, I received underlayment material for a flooring project. The Freecycler invited me inside his home to see his new floor, and gave me tools he no longer needed to help with my own project. While I was there, another lady arrived to claim a Shop-Vac he was offering, and she, too, offered flooring advice.

With more than 20,000 members, Portland has one of the most active Freecycle groups in the world, and there are groups specific to Vancouver, Wash., and to Washington County. Portland Freecycle moderator Albert Kaufman says the most common items up for grabs are baby clothes, and while offering kittens and puppies is not allowed (unlike the online bulletin board on Craigslist, which includes a "free" category under its for-sale items) Washington County moderator Ronald Fabricante says one lady posted looking for a date for her dog.

Now I've started to amass clutter here in my new place. I swear this stuff is breeding when I'm not looking.

Since I've been here, I've given away more items, including a set of margarita glasses and a self-cleaning litter box. My condo community has started a neighborhood-specific Freecycle program — to curb still-usable items being left out for the trash and reduce our pickup charges, and to build a stronger community. I even freecycled a day lily to a neighbor who planted it in a space where we can all enjoy it.

#### **What is it?**

Freecycle is an online network of people giving and getting items for free in their own cities and towns. Each Freecycle group is moderated by local volunteers. Membership is free, and Freecycle is entirely nonprofit.

- Freecycle communities worldwide: 3,613
- Freecycle members worldwide: 2,305,711

To sign up for — or create — a group, visit [www.freecycle.org](http://www.freecycle.org).

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