



re-Claim, re-Purpose, re-Think



One local retailer takes sustainability and going green in a creative direction
By Margo Pierce

Sun-catchers made from recycled glass are a great example of ways to recycle and re-use, but have you ever seen earrings made from bottle caps, a change purse made out of candy wrappers, a binder made from computer parts or a purse made from tire inner tubes? Unconventional and one-of-a-kind items are what you'll find at re-, where discarded objects are recycled into art and other useful gifts.

"Most everything has been recycled or reclaimed from something else," says Nancy Martin, founder and owner of re-. "We also carry items made from sustainable materials and items to help you make better choices for the environment."

"What makes us unique is that we're all about making better decisions for the planet overall." Martin hopes the shop will inspire people to "think differently" about the things they are throwing away.

"So many people purchase without thinking about the long-term ramifications," she says. "Think about what's going to happen when you're done with this item. Can it be re-purposed? Can it be recycled or is it going to end up in a landfill and be there hundreds or thousands of years from now?"

Describing herself as the daughter of

"depression era parents," Martin learned a lot about extending the life of anything and everything while she was growing up. "Quilting was an original form of recycling. Clothing was passed to another generation, altered, patched or eventually worn out. The remaining useful fabric was then used to create a quilt," Martin explains. "That's what they're doing with Indian saris and Guatemalan blouses now. Much of the fabric is still beautiful and usable, so they're making them into purses."

re- hosts a variety of classes that support the philosophy of the store. Every January is a box making class that turns the wall calendar from the previous year into a functional set of gift boxes. A Chicago artist will soon teach a class on how to re-purpose a wool sweater that was accidentally tossed into the dryer and give it a second life as a purse or jewelry.

The concept of reducing, reusing and recycling is serious business, but it can also be fun, according to Martin.

"We have reusable gift bags. They're made from cloth and you can track them," she says. "You go on line, register the number of the bag and say, 'This is going to Aunt Sally in New York.' When Aunt Sally reuses the bag, she goes on line and does the same thing. You get an e-mail that says,


'Your bag has now left New York and it's on its way to Florida.' How cool is that?" Martin regularly looks for philanthropic organizations that support new business ventures in third-world countries and non-profit organizations.

"We have a company that melts down glass that would normally go into a landfill and makes sun catchers and ornaments," she says. "All the proceeds – not just the profits – go to local charities. They give back to the community and it's just another way of recycling. We have also partnered with a woman's cooperative in Bangladesh to start a program called 'Books for Bangladesh' using a portion of the profits from their products to send back to them."



FOR MORE INFO

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