

Trash to Treasure recycles, repurposes for garage sale

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Onalee Fox, right, and other shoppers search through the goods at the the sixth annual Trash to Treasure garage sale.

A rowing machine, a 7UP snowboard and “Dirty Dancing: The Game” lay among furniture and piles of clothing at the sixth annual Trash to Treasure garage sale.

The event, held at the Recreational Sports Center, supports the Campus Environmental Center, a student-run organization responsible for coordinating campus recycling and other sustainability programs. The center collected donated items from students moving out at the end of the spring and from garage sales and Craigslist.

Karen Blaney, the group's staff adviser, said more people are holding on to older items because of the poor economy, but she said there were still enough items to have a successful sale.

“A massive amount of usable material goes into landfills because Austin has such a transient population,” Blaney said. “So many people are focused on new, but others see the value of repurposing. What good are cleaning supplies if we don't occasionally need to scrub some bleach into something and make it new again?”

The center raised between \$5,000 and \$7,000 from the sale, said event coordinator Laura Freytes Diaz. The money helps support educational programs, recycling management and initiatives such as the Orange Bike Project, which allows students to rent bikes for a semester.

“We sold most of the furniture today, and there was a steady stream of people all day,” Freytes Diaz said. “[The sale] helps reduce waste, and we can help students get things for cheaper.”

Students and Austin residents roamed through the aisles of discarded items to find deals and, as in the case of accounting junior Hope McMahon, furnish new homes. McMahon said she didn’t know the event was a fundraiser for the Campus Environmental Center until she arrived, but was glad to learn that the student body and the environment would benefit from the sale’s profits.

“It’s a great way to get students involved in environmental initiatives because everyone wants to save money,” she said. “I just need to decorate my apartment for less, but it will also help the campus be more environmentally friendly.”

Blaney said about 70 percent of the crowd was composed of people affiliated with UT in some way, but many garage-sale hounds from around the city mingled with students at the sale.

“I was dragged down by some friends,” Austin resident Ray Smalley said. “It’s not a hard sell to get me to come to something like this, and everything they have is in pretty good shape.”

The event is a great option for students who are moving or who forget items when they come back to Austin, said radio-television-film sophomore Alma Zavala, who volunteered at the event.

“The prices are so reasonable, and stores are crazy because it’s tax-free weekend,” Zavala said. “And this is an example of students being proactive about what they believe is right for the environment. It’s the ‘reuse’ part of ‘reduce, reuse, recycle.’”

Freytes Diaz said students are responsible for creating and coordinating the sale each year, which in turn raises money that goes back to support campus environmental resources.

“We have a lot of work with recycling and more bins than we used to, and we work to educate people,” she said. “That all costs money. Students help us, and we help students take care of the environment.”