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TOWNSEND NEWS

First textile recycling drive a success

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TOWNSEND --Throughout the morning on Saturday, Oct. 6, over a dozen people unloaded plastic bag after bag and hauled them into the trailer parked out front of the school. The bags were not full of trash; they were stuffed full of memories. An outgrown pair of sneakers here, a childhood pillow there, a worn-out pair of jeans, pocketbooks with broken straps, all rendered useless or discarded by the former owners.

The day's events were a culmination of the week-long textile recycling drive that had been held in each of the Townsend public schools. The drive was sponsored by MassToss and the Townsend Recycling Committee. Each class in each school competed against one another to donate the most bags full of old textiles and fabric. At the end of the day, Irene Congdon, chairwoman of the Recycling Committee and recycling coordinator for Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection, drove the trailer off the lot, hauling 5,820 pounds of textiles.

In Spaulding Elementary School, the winning class was Shelley Amari's second grade class, with 79 bags. In total, the school produced 462. At Hawthorne Brook Middle School, the sixth graders won with 83 bags, beating the fifth graders by a narrow margin of a single bag; in total, the school collected 205. The winning class for the high school was the senior class, with 74 out of 131 bags.

Each winning class received \$50 and the Townsend Ecumenical Outreach received \$100.

This was the first time the Recycling Committee has run a textile drive; Congdon said the intent was to bring awareness to the amount of textiles that are thrown away unnecessarily.

"When we think of recycling, we worry about paper, plastic, metal and glass. We never think about textiles," said Congdon.

The committee also wanted to use the opportunity to highlight the new textile donation bins they've put up around town, including two in front of the high school. People can donate any type of textile round the clock as long as it is not wet and doesn't contain an odor.

Last year, Congdon said, MassDEP conducted a waste audit of the state.

"They found out that six percent of all solid waste in Massachusetts is textiles," she said. "They also realized that on a yearly basis, each person throws out about 71 pounds of textiles."

People throw away items such as broken sneakers, socks riddled with holes and ruined clothing without realizing that those items can have a second life.

"(Textiles) are entirely reusable," said Recycling Committee member Susan Shaine. "If they're not contaminated, they're recyclable."

The committee partnered with Bay State Textiles for the drive; the textile recycling company bought the donated textiles at \$100 per ton. Paul Curry of Bay State Textiles said that the company has been aware of the problem for years; in the early 1990s, a study showed that each person threw out about 50 pounds of textiles each year, and the number has increased dramatically since then.

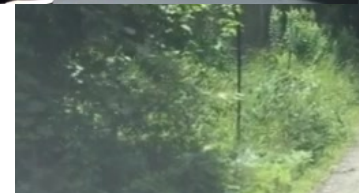
"We're only reclaiming 15 percent. We have a huge job ahead of us. Most of it ends up in landfills," he said.

Recycling the material through Bay State Textiles, he said, is a triple win. The amount collected is that much that doesn't end up in landfills every year and instead of paying \$70 per ton to tip the waste, the municipality or organization earns \$100 per ton. Additionally, the material is reused in communities that need it.

"There's a huge market all over the world for this material; that's where I come in," said Curry. "Customers in developing countries purchase this material. It's a very important part of their economy."



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A good portion of the material is still-usable clothing. The countries that purchase it clean and stitch it up and sell it for a greatly reduced cost. The material collected from Townsend will likely end up in Guatemala, said Curry.

"They need this material for their population," he said.

Even the material that is not suitable for reuse in its original form is cut up and used as rags or shredded down to use for carpet or insulation.

The children involved in the drive saw beyond the prizes they were competing for.

"(It's important) to not throw away good stuff," said 7-year-old Ashton Donia from Amari's class.

"It's a good thing; instead of growing out of something and having to give it away, you can recycle it," said fifth-grader Katherine Tomasetti, 11.

The original goal for the event was 1,000 bags, but Congdon is nevertheless impressed with the results.

"I think it's great for the first time. I'm very proud," she said.

She hopes to make the drive an annual event and potentially expand it beyond Townsend, with nearby towns competing against one another.

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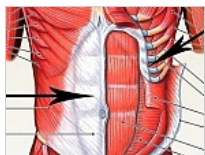
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