

Even cartridges that can't be remanufactured are reincarnated as tables and park benches!

news

Are you sitting on a toner cartridge?

What do you do with all those surplus EPN and EPS cartridges?" asked the newsletter of the Australasian Cartridge Remanufacturers Association (ACRA) recently. Apart from the more obvious answer, "store them in a shed?" the newsletter came up with a more innovative approach, which demanded further investigation.

Tasmanian Michael Lemm recycles them at his ALC premises in Hobart, and they end up as park benches!

ACRA news editor and executive officer, David Gibbons, on a visit to ALC noticed that Lemm has purchased a large plastic shredder and "feeds the hungry blighter with the empty shells of surplus cartridges." It spits out millions of tiny plastic pellets which he ships off to Melbourne.

"It won't make me rich," says Michael. "The real money is in the remanufactured cartridge. But I promote the fact to my customers that every empty cartridge gets recycled."

And what happens to those plastic granules? They are moulded into 1.8m olive green park benches - the Kakadu Park bench - which are as solid as the concrete/wooden ones, graffiti resistant, competitively priced - and made from recycled cartridges!

The Rotary Club of D'Entrecasteaux Channel south of Hobart engaged in a joint project with the Department of Infrastructure, Energy and Resources to install four recycled benches in bus shelters, just one example of how these recycled benches are helping communities.

A recycled picnic table and bench is also available, as well as wheel stops, speed humps and traffic control "buttons and bars." You may even be drinking from a former photocopier bottle at this very minute. Recycled insulated coffee cups which keep drinks hot longer are the latest innovative idea from Corporate Recycling. And of course, the rulers made from recycled cartridges were a hit at the first Remax show in 2000.

"We are part of the Corporate Recycling group which is based in Melbourne," says Michael. "Apart from



Staff members from left to right Tony Palmer, Michael Parker, Michael Lemm and Phillip Isaac.

the bench seats etc side of Corporate Recycling, one of the reasons we got involved was to reduce/eliminate our own factory's waste stream of plastic toner bottles and unservicable cartridge components. This has been largely achieved."

Corporate Recycling's goal is to have zero landfill from the waste it collects. At present, 80 percent of the waste collected is diverted from landfill, and several strategic partners are currently working with Corporate Recycling to reduce landfill waste closer to their target.

In Tasmania, estimates for 2001 suggest that around 5,000 cardboard boxes and inserts, 3,500 aluminium drum units, 6,000 plastic cartridge units, and 6,000 plastic bottles were diverted from landfill or remanufactured by ALC, saving the equivalent of 115 barrels of oil, 48 trees, 105,000 litres of water, or 15 kwh of electricity.

David Gibbons, recently responded to a challenge made by Kyocera Mita. He wrote to the company saying, "ACRA welcomes Kyocera Mita's challenge to business to help clean up Australia as per their press release dated 4 February 2002. For almost 15 years, ACRA members around Australia and New Zealand have been encouraging business to do likewise.

"It is a fact that every new toner and ink cartridge which is sold in Australia and New Zealand has been imported in the first place, and almost eighty percent of that ends up in landfill. ACRA members are concerned for the environment and use positive strategies to recycle used cartridges.

"ACRA members are able to recycle most of those used cartridges for less than what it would cost to purchase a new one. They pride themselves on using latest technology to provide fully warranted, quality cartridges. This



Are you sitting on a toner cartridge? - continued

service provides jobs for Australians and New Zealanders, lowers the levels of imports, as well as providing a practical solution to the environment problem caused by empty cartridges."

This type of pro-active campaigning can only be good for the industry.

Australian Laser Charge has built its business on what Michael admits are some "old fashioned values" but he combines these with the state of the art aid of e-commerce. ALC recognise the customers want more from those they deal with than price alone. They also look for prompt and friendly service, reliability, and quality.

"Some of our competitors recycle cartridges more cheaply than us," admits Michael, "but I am sure most of our customers choose us because they know of our reputation for quality at a fair price - not necessarily the cheapest price."

Michael's route into the remanufacturing business was not what you might call direct. He spent 20 years as a bank officer before he started looking for a change of direction. As is usually the case, the opportunity to enter the business arose by chance, and Michael bought a cartridge business as

a going concern, first operating from suburban premises before moving to central Hobart.

Remaining in Hobart has raised a few eyebrows in mainland Australia, but Michael doesn't hesitate as he reels off his reasons for staying.

Real Estate is affordable, the workforce is stable - and with three of the four original staff members still with the firm, who can argue with that - and modern air freight and online ordering means that physical location is no longer a major consideration. So, despite Tasmania being considered by many Australians as "off the map" it provides no barriers to ALC being seen as a business catering to a national market.

Maintaining a large stock is another way to ensure that orders can be fulfilled, most of them within 24 hours. The client base now extends from Perth in the South West to Cairns in the North.

Email Michael for more details:
alc@lasercharge.com.au
 or visit the website at
www.lasercharge.com.au



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15 Spinners Court, West End, Witney, Oxfordshire, OX28 1NH UK
 Tel: +44 (0) 1993 899800 Fax: +44 (0) 1993 899801
 e-mail: info@therecycler.com www.therecycler.com