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Electronics recycler Silicon Alley seeking volunteers and interns The nonprofit refurbishes, donates used electronics *CHRISTA BUCHANAN; C & G Staff Writer*

Electronics are used for just about everything in this increasingly tech-savvy world, and people, and on a much bigger scale corporations, are upgrading their gadgets with increasing frequency.

But what happens to all that used electronic equipment, the computers, cell phones, TVs, servers, etc.?

Unfortunately, a lot of it ends up in landfills.

This fact hit home for metro Detroiters Ron Bryant and Carl Ludwikowski after they read an article stating that southeast Michigan alone sends more than 2 billion pounds of electronic waste into landfills, yearly.

This news, said Bryant, spurred them to start Silicon Alley Recyclers, a nonprofit organization with a mission of providing "a complete, 'cost-free' solution" to companies in regard to disposing electronic waste.

"The main focus is on corporations. The 2 billion pounds going into landfills is not happening from individuals, it's corporations. Individuals have opportunities to recycle (in their communities). ? Companies pay big money to recyclers - or **dump** - that's why we focus on companies," said Bryant, adding that for Silicon Alley, success means "recycling products into useful life and not adding to landfills."

Silicon Alley not only saves companies the expense of disposing of used electronics, it also helps protect the health of people and the environment, as electronic waste contains many toxic materials.

"The average 17-inch monitor has 4 pounds of lead in the glass alone. Heaven forbid this should ever leak into the landfills," said Bryant, executive director of Silicon Alley, adding that they will soon be receiving 501(c)(3) status, which will enable them to increase their recycling efforts.

However, Silicon Alley's mission doesn't stop there. The equipment they receive is either broken down into raw materials and recycled, or refurbished, with the hard drive wiped clean using "software exceeding U.S. government Department of Defense specifications." Silicon Alley offers "blanket" certification of this process, as well as certificates of recycling/reuse and/or destruction, if necessary. The equipment is then donated to local nonprofit and charitable organizations, which they add to their "GivingWall," a brick wall highlighting the organizations they have helped.

Focus:HOPE, a Detroit-based civil and human rights nonprofit, was one of the first organizations to utilize this service. The benefit has been twofold, said Diana Hoover, a Focus:HOPE educator and Silicon Alley volunteer who helped coordinate the partnership. The nonprofit recycles its outdated equipment through Silicon Alley, which in turn donates computers to Focus:HOPE's educational outreach programs.

"The computers make it so Focus:Hope students can be successful. (The partnership) was set up so students could get computers, and then for recycling ? we were paying \$4,000 to \$10,000 a year for recycling. (They) saved us that much in recycling," said Hoover.

"Upwards of 80 percent of the products we receive can be refurbished into proper working condition. (As) most products come from companies, we can give a better grade of product. We have the ability to give

complete systems," said Bryant, adding that they sell some of the refurbished equipment at their Computer and Electronics Thrift Store and at Gibraltar Trade Center to fund their endeavor.

So far, Silicon Alley, which recently celebrated its first year of service, has donated approximately 400 computers to local charitable organizations.

"We don't have enough places to give equipment. Our goal by next May is to give 200 (computers) a month," said Bryant, adding that they are seeking "schools, churches, nonprofits and outreach programs, especially for kids. There's hundreds of thousands of kids that need computers (who) need to keep up (with technology) to succeed."

With only two employees, Bryant and Ludwikowski, just a handful of volunteers and an ever-increasing inventory, they are also seeking volunteers and interns for an electronic recycling program that is set to debut in November. The 100-hour internship incorporates coursework with hands-on training, and those who complete the program will receive a certificate. "It's been overwhelming to keep up. We're definitely looking for volunteers. We especially need volunteers to lift and tote monitors, clean ? anyone can help. We've

had retirees, crews from Goodwill and Focus:HOPE, concerned individuals, high school kids," said Bryant, adding that while tech knowledge is helpful, it's not necessary.

"It's a good opportunity for high school kids that need community service," said Hoover of volunteering at Silicon Alley.

For more information about Silicon Alley, to volunteer or to sign up for an internship, visit www.siliconalleyrecyclers.us, call (248) 613-1419, or stop by the Computer and Electronics Thrift Store, 24835 Ryan Road in Warren, 10 a.m.-8 p.m. Tuesday- Thursday or 10 a.m.-2 p.m. Saturday.

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