

EXHIBIT 32

EAST BAY LIFE by Paul Kilduff

As seen on TV: Jennifer Ramirez, a volunteer with the East Bay chapter of Freecycle, shows off the brand-new 19" flat-screen TV she got for free through the online community.

Volume 36, Number 3, December 2005

Published by The East Bay Monthly ©2005
by the Berkeley Monthly Inc.
All rights reserved

Free-For-All

An online community offering free stuff reduces landfill fodder and saves folks money. Welcome to the cashless society.

The late architect Frank Lloyd Wright once observed that "wealthy people are little more than janitors of their possessions." This from a guy who built mansions for the wealthy to squirrel away their stuff—but it sums most of us up nonetheless. You don't have to be a high roller to fall into the stuff-trap—compulsive consumption of clothes, camping gear, books, and lunchbox collections you don't even like anymore.

But most traditional options for uncluttering your life aren't great. Throw a garage sale and your neighbors stop by to chat, but will they actually buy anything? Advertise on Craigslist and risk attracting legions of no-shows—even for the stuff you put in the free category. Call Goodwill to pick up your grandfather's duct-taped plaid recliner, and after one look at the dog hair, they pass.

Then there's Freecycle.

More than an open Web site, Freecycle is a free online community operated by volunteers and without advertising. Membership proffers daily E-mail postings of items for give-away and the opportunity to advertise your own free stuff, or requests for specific items. The rules: Everything must be free, legal, and appropriate for all ages. This eliminates postings like the ubiquitous spam offering a free iPod (which actually

requires you to fill out a lengthy online survey) or the "casual encounters" found on Craigslist.

Two years ago, Deron Beal, a 37-year-old MBA graduate, was working for a Tucson recycling nonprofit called "Downtown Don't Waste It!" when he came up with the idea for Freecycle. As Beal's crews found perfectly good stuff headed for the landfill, they often drove around to see if local nonprofits could use it. Realizing there had to be a better way to share the wealth, and stop feeding the dump, Beal set up the first Freecycle E-mail group. His vision is to form local recycling communities, so members won't end up driving miles and miles, burning fossil fuels that clog the air, to pick up a free stereo.

Today more than 1.7 million members of 3,084 separate Freecycle communities, operate in more than 50 countries. The East Bay chapter, started last year by Scott Jung, then a 17-year-old Dublin high school student, now has more than 3,800 members.

"It's a wonderful thing to do for the environment," says Jennifer Ramirez, who, along with Susan Armstrong, took over running the East Bay chapter in August 2005 when Jung moved to Los Angeles to attend USC. "Our society is so me, me, me. Freecycle makes you feel like

you're doing something. When you give something to a big corporation, you got rid of it but it doesn't make you feel good."

Ramirez knows first-hand about the pitfalls of large organizations, even nonprofits, soliciting donations. As a former accountant for a drug-treatment program, she saw donated items mishandled. "We got way more than we [the nonprofit] could use, but we couldn't let people know that we were getting too much," she recalls. "Sometimes [the nonprofit] would just let the employees go into the warehouse and take items."

Ramirez, who now works by day for the California State Parks Foundation in Kentfield, also volunteers from one to three hours a day from her Richmond home screening the E-mail posts for the East Bay and San Francisco Freecycle communities, both of which average about 30 posts a day.

To test the outer limits of Freecycle, I posted my desire for a reliable Japanese car. Even though I thought this was a little cheeky, as it turned out I had nothing to worry about. Posts for cars and even houses are allowed on both the East Bay and San Francisco Freecycle listserves. But just because it's allowed doesn't mean other members won't complain, as happened when someone posted for a house on the San Francisco site.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 10

FN 000712

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 9

"Some members got very upset about this and sent derogatory messages to the author of the post," says Ramirez. "We let people ask for pretty much anything. Believe me, our members will decide for themselves if they think the post is outrageous. Technically, the house request does not meet the number one criterion for a Freecycle posting: Will this keep something out of the landfill? When you post anything that's what you should think of. That's why Deron Beal started Freecycle—to keep people from buying new things and throwing away the old stuff that's still good," says Ramirez.

Obviously, homes are not headed for the landfill and in many other communities such a request would be rejected immediately. Cars are a little different, but could end up in junkyards, which are similar to landfills. Posts that Ramirez had to delete include one for a blow-up sex doll and a sword.

While I'm still waiting for my car, big-ticket items are given away regularly on Freecycle. Ramirez has heard through the Freecycle moderators' grapevine that these have included at least one house (she had no details on where), boats, and yes, cars. Ramirez herself has been the beneficiary of several finds, including a brand-new 19" flat-screen TV (it was a gift and the guy didn't watch television) and a set of custom-made silk curtains that fit the windows of her house. The only things she hasn't been able to give away are a VCR that jammed tapes and her husband's dinky '80s-era Mac. No shock there.

Not everything you get on Freecycle is a bargain—and caveat emptor definitely applies. I recently picked up a desktop copier, having been told it needed a new drum. That sounds pretty minor, I thought, and picked up the prize. At OfficeMax I found that at \$94 the copier drum cost more than a new copier with a scanner. I may now be posting for a drum. Then again, this copier may end up being found by an archaeologist digging through a landfill in 6043.

Each Freecycle group has its own rules. San Francisco doesn't allow pets to be offered, but East Bay does. San Francisco requires prospective members to give their zip code to make sure they're true West Bay residents. The East Bay group says it's mainly for residents of Alameda and Contra Costa Counties, but welcomes anyone from the Bay Area. If it's obvious you're from outside the Bay Area, posting items that people may end up driving miles to pick up, you'll be removed from the list. No sense reducing the landfill if you're just filling the air with lots of car fumes.

While it's nice to know I could pick up an unopened bottle of Mr. & Mrs. T Margarita Mix from my neighbor on Freecycle, this is a community that exists solely in cyberspace, so real human interaction is pretty limited. If you really want to get to know your fellow Freecyclers, Burning Man is your best option. The

civilized world's only cashless society, once you've ponied up your entry fee (which can run as high as \$300 if you don't buy your ticket well in advance). Burning Man's only buyable commodities at the event are café drinks and ice. Everything else, including vast amounts of booze, is free.

Not surprisingly, many Burners use Freecycle to obtain supplies they'll need for the event such as camping equipment. San Francisco lighting designer and stage manager Patti Meyer wouldn't have enjoyed the intense Nevada high desert sun much last summer without the shade structure she obtained on SF Freecycle. "Burning Man is a gifting community. Freecycle is the same thing," says Meyer, who recently moved to a smaller apartment in San Francisco and gave away her couch, desk, tables, and chairs on Freecycle.

"You give without expecting anything in return," she explains of the gifting economy principle. "So many people were quick to

"Will this keep something out of the landfill? When you post anything that's what you should think of. That's why Deron Beal started Freecycle—to keep people from buying new things and throwing away the old stuff that's still good."

help me when I asked for it on Freecycle. And when I got to Burning Man one part [of the structure] was incorrect. We asked for a bit of help, and instantly, we had people offering tools and suggestions. Between the information I received on Freecycle and the help I received once I arrived, I was able to fully learn about constructing a temporary home for myself."

That kind of neighborliness doesn't grow on trees, or at your local Target. Meyer, like many Freecycle devotees, appreciates it more than just the free stuff she gets. "We make it and exist in this crazy life experience because of each other," she says. "We are a team and we have to stick together and share what we have." ●

To find out more about Freecycle, visit their umbrella organization's Web site at www.freecycle.org. To join the East Bay group, go to their Web site at <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/FreecycleEastSFBayArea>.

Paul Kilduff is a freelancer based in San Francisco and a regular columnist for The Monthly. He thanks the "gifting" economy for his dining room set and Ronco Showtime Rotisserie 3000.