

Learn the many things you can do to help prevent your child's **asthma** attacks.



THE GLOBE AND MAIL

February 12, 2010

ReStore to the rescue, one carpet tile at a time

By Angela Kryhul
Special to The Globe and Mail

Habitat for Humanity ramps up to recycle material ripped from commercial property. Lightly used door hinges, anyone?

It isn't easy to find a new home for used carpet, so when Habitat for Humanity said it could resell 80,000 square feet of carpet tiles ripped out of Toronto's Royal Trust Tower, Francesca Palleschi was relieved to be able to load 70 skids and ship them directly to one of Habitat's local ReStore retail locations.

Just a few years ago, that carpet might have ended up in landfill, says Ms. Palleschi, project manager with Curmann Contracting Ltd., which is working on the Royal Trust Tower refit. But, as more commercial refit projects commit to the idea of keeping demolition and construction waste away from landfill, Habitat for Humanity's ReStore operation is reaping the benefits.

Commercial property owners, landlords, refit project managers and contractors are looking for new ways to dispose of used materials, and they're inviting Habitat for Humanity into their buildings - well before salvagers, recyclers and interior demolition crews - to rescue anything that might be resold to the public. Items range from kitchenettes, toilets and sinks to marble and granite slabs, light fixtures, door handles and hinges.

About two years ago, Habitat Toronto started ramping up its ability to receive commercial refit material as more commercial property owners began pursuing Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design accreditation for their refitted buildings, says Derek Harney, vice-president of Toronto ReStore operations.

LEED points are earned when jobsite materials and waste are diverted from landfill, and that can be achieved by donating materials to an organization such as Habitat, or bringing in recyclers, salvagers and material resellers. But LEED likely isn't the only reason. Municipalities and provinces across the country are moving toward zero-waste targets.

"We had never really considered commercial refits before. It was thought to be beyond our scope, and in practical terms it probably was. But we knew we had to build our capacity and our retail footprint," Mr. Harney says. "We're at the point now that we can handle things on this scale."

Habitat for Humanity has 73 affiliates across Canada, and a total of 61 ReStore locations in every province except Newfoundland and Labrador. All ReStore revenues are used to cover administrative and fundraising costs, which means the not-for-profit organization is able to funnel all cash donations directly toward building homes for needy families.

The bulk of the material for sale in the ReStores still comes from residential renovation and building sites, and from corporate donors such as Home Depot and Eurofase Lighting of Richmond Hill, Ont. Last year, however, Mr. Harney was invited to pick and choose materials from six large-scale refits in the Toronto area, including several floors of the Royal Trust Tower, and at 222 Jarvis St., a 58,336-square-metre office building being refitted by the Ontario Realty Corporation.

Meanwhile, Tom Riessner, director of ReStore operations, Habitat Greater Vancouver, is figuring out how he will store one million square feet of used drywall, insulation and other materials when temporary buildings erected for the 2010 Olympics - such as the International Media Centre in Robson Square Plaza - are deconstructed when the Games are over.

"My full-time job right now is trying to find warehouse space," Mr. Riessner says. "I don't think we will be able to take it all because we don't have the resources to store it. We will take what we can and cram it into the stores."

Mr. Riessner, too, has noticed an increase in invitations from commercial refit projects over the past year. Habitat Vancouver was recently asked by shopping centre developer Ivanhoe Cambridge to pick through materials left behind by a credit union that had vacated space in its Richmond Centre mall in Richmond, B.C. Habitat walked away with in/out trays, coffee makers and even the rope lines used to guide credit union customers toward the tellers. Mr. Riessner estimates that material coming from commercial refits represents at least 10 per cent of sales at the two Vancouver-area ReStore locations, which had combined sales of about \$1.1-million last year.

The Richmond Centre donation to Habitat was a good idea that Ivanhoe Cambridge may consider again throughout its operations, says Chris Long, vice-president of property services for the Montreal-based developer.

"This is an idea that I'm going to look into because it makes such great business sense, especially from a corporate responsibility standpoint," Mr. Long says.

Developing the commercial refit stream as a steady supplier to Habitat ReStores is a "real opportunity," says Sam Purdy, director of ReStore services for Waterloo, Ont.-based Habitat for Humanity Canada.

However, one of the biggest challenges is that, as a volunteer-driven organization, even larger affiliates such as Vancouver and Toronto don't always have the resources to be able to collect and store materials, Mr. Purdy explains.

Mr. Harney says that he sometimes has to turn down an opportunity if street parking is an issue or if no service elevators are available for his crew to remove materials from a building.

And Habitat is picky about what it will take out of a refit - they don't want to be stuck with items that nobody wants to buy, such as old fluorescent light fixtures. It's important to educate contractors and property owners about what is and isn't resalable to the public, according to Mr. Harney and Mr. Riessner, and to encourage home and business owners to source used items when building and redecorating.

Perhaps a more pressing issue is that the huge volume of stuff coming out of commercial refits vastly outstrips the demand, says Ms. Pallezchi, who spends much of her time trying to find resellers and recyclers to take material such as the carpet tiles.

"I think people want to be green. But I don't believe there are enough homes for everything. All the kinks haven't been worked out of the system yet."

Salvage and reinvention

With apologies to Forrest Gump, the business of rescuing an older building's fittings and fixtures is like a box of chocolates: You never know what you're going to get, and you must know what your local customer wants to buy.

Every building, and every refit project, is unique. Habitat Vancouver, for example, is accustomed to receiving materials from the local motion picture industry that were used to construct television and movie sets.

Habitat Toronto, meanwhile, does a booming business in kitchen millwork - including cabinetry - which represents as much as 30 per cent of sales in the three Toronto ReStores, Mr. Harney says.

Unique and vintage items are hot sellers. Habitat Toronto removed hundreds of marble slabs from 222 Jarvis St., which were snapped up by ReStore customers, including one homeowner who reused them as treads on his basement stairs. Mr. Harney has also resold items from churches, including solid oak pews, wood panelling, and stained and leaded-glass windows.

Among habitat customers are interior decorators looking for special items, artisans who convert items to new uses, and contractors looking for vintage fittings that can be used to restore older homes.

CTVglobemedia Publishing, Inc