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## 'It's better than recycling'

JOHN DODGE; Staff writer

OLYMPIA - Six months after moving into a new retail outlet three times larger than its old one, the South Puget Sound Habitat for Humanity ReStore is busier than ever.

The increased inventory, customer traffic and sales of recycled and donated building and home improvement supplies at the downtown Olympia store are good for the environment and good for families who benefit from Habitat for Humanity's home-building program, supporters said.

ReStore is on pace to divert some 450 tons of materials into the hands of do-it-yourselfers and contractors this fiscal year, which ends June 30, store manager Caleb White said. That's stuff that might otherwise end up in the garbage or recycled, instead of reused.

"Reuse is always the top priority – it's better than recycling," noted Terri Thomas, an education and outreach specialist for Thurston County Solid Waste. "We're excited to see the new store – they're doing a great job."

Revenues from the store, which are averaging about \$12,000 to \$15,000 a month since the move, help support Habitat for Humanity's home-building program, said Shannon Michlitsch, development manager for South Puget Sound Habitat for Humanity.

"Instead of four homes per year, we'll be able to build five homes per year," Michlitsch said of the benefits of the larger store and inventory.

Michlitsch said for every home Habitat for Humanity builds in South Sound, there are more than 50 needy families on the waiting list.

"The need for these homes certainly hasn't gone away," she said.

ReStore is located in an 18,000 square-foot warehouse at 415 Olympia Ave. It is the former home of Olympia Salvage, which went out of business last year and the Hardel Builders Center, which moved to west Olympia in 1998.

The former ReStore on Thurston Avenue had about 5,500 square feet of retail space, White said.

"We not only have more inventory, it's organized better and easier to find," White said. "No more walking sideways through the aisles."

White said the new store is averaging about 70 to 80 transactions daily and includes a more diverse clientele than the old store served.

Jay Kuerst, a customer who purchased paint supplies at ReStore last week, said the new store is a vast improvement.

He said he shops at Restore to take advantage of the price discounts. Items start at 50 percent of retail and typically drop by 25 percent each month they remain on the shelf.

“You do what you can to save what you can,” he said.

Like many ReStore customers, Kuerst looks for items at ReStore first. If he can’t find them, then he heads for the larger retail stores.

“It’s kind of like the lottery,” he said. “Sometimes you win and sometimes you lose.”

“You have better odds here than the lottery,” Michlitsch said.

White said about 70 percent of the items in the store are donated by individuals, everything from used furniture – no rips, stains or pet hair – to sinks, light fixtures, mailboxes and tools. Corporate donors make up the other 30 percent.

Donated items are tax deductible and a ReStore crew is available to pick up larger items donors can’t bring to the store.

Lumber continues to be the item most in demand, White said.

“It goes out the door as fast as it comes in,” he said.

And what does ReStore have more of than it probably needs?