

Opinion

Another Voice / Recycling

Another Voice: Old clothing should be donated, not thrown away

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By Ron Missel

Most everyone knows that used clothing can be donated locally to organizations like Goodwill, Salvation Army, Amvets, Buffalo City Mission, Hearts for the Homeless and St. Vincent de Paul. (All are now grouped loosely under the umbrella of the WNY Coalition for Donated Goods.)

You will begin to see more activity from this group, as evidenced by recent collection initiatives in Niagara Square and the Walden Galleria, and upcoming at the Boulevard Mall on Jan. 19.

You probably also know that these organizations utilize thrift shops to sell clothing and generate revenues, but you may not know that the profits fund a range of much-needed community services. These efforts are varied but include addiction programs, senior services, home visits, GED preparation, meals, shelter, personal counseling and employment activities like job placement and workforce readiness.

Here are some important facts you may also not know, as provided by the WNY Coalition for Donated Goods: 85 percent of clothing and textiles end up in the trash and consume 5 percent of all U.S. landfill space. The average person throws away 70 pounds of clothes and textiles a year.

Why? There's a belief that if clothes are torn, stained or sufficiently worn, they can't be reused and won't be accepted as a donation. In fact, a full 95 percent of donated clothing is repurposed. Only 30 percent ends up on the display racks in the thrift shops, but much more of it is donated to needy individuals locally or shipped to third world countries and disaster relief efforts. And if clothing is deemed no longer wearable, it is baled and sold to commodity brokers for use as rags or insulation.

In general, reusing and recycling keeps all sorts of items out of landfills, reduces over-utilization of our natural resources and reduces the energy consumption required to manufacture and distribute new goods and materials. Donating clothing has a similar impact. It takes substantial amounts of water and energy to manufacture and distribute new clothing.

By donating, you can extend the life of clothing that might otherwise end up in a landfill.

Lastly, since the holiday season is a time for giving, why not take a hard look at your wardrobe? Are there items you don't wear anymore, or wear only infrequently?

If so, consider donating them to the organizations listed above, or to any of the clothing drives sponsored by businesses, churches and charitable groups this time of the year.

You won't have to look hard to find a donation box, and your effort and generosity will make a difference to a lot of people.

Ron Missel writes on recycling for the Niagara Sierra Club TrailBlazer newsletter and is a representative to the Buffalo Recycling Alliance.

