

PAYING IT FORWARD IN COTTAGE GROVE HELPS THOSE IN NEED

“We’ve been pretty busy these last couple days,” says Mindy Beer, who created Pay It Forward Cottage Grove a year ago with her daughter, Jennifer Neil. As Christmas approaches and the weather has turned colder, people have turned to Pay It Forward to give and receive everything from baby formula to refurbished bicycles.

Over the past year the all-volunteer group has networked through Facebook and by word of mouth to accomplish its very simple and much needed goal: to get the usable items people don’t need to the people who need them, for free. The concept of paying it forward — passing generosity on to someone else after someone was generous to you — has been around for years, but the 2000 film *Pay It Forward* kickstarted the kindness movement more recently.

Neil and Beer created the site almost as an inside joke, Beer tells *EW*. Her daughter saw some local Pay It Forward pages and told Beer, “Mom, I know we could do better than that!” Within a year the Facebook page has grown to more than 2,000 members, and the group has given and received thousands of items. Beer says they’ve had mothers come with newborn children and no money and leave with everything they need, from formula to clothing. A quick glance at the Facebook page shows post after post from people giving and needing clothing, breast pumps, furniture, Christmas ornaments, toys and more.

Beer says she and Neil started off housing items in their garages, but soon both the needs and the generosity of the community outgrew those spaces. Now Pay It Forward Cottage Grove operates out of a carport on Beer’s property, one that Beer is hoping to enclose with some donated garage doors and lumber. Beer says they hope to become a nonprofit someday and pay some of the 15 or so volunteers who spend hours sorting through items. For now, Beer pays the \$100 electricity bill to keep the open carport lit and warm, and she also pay the fees for hauling broken or unusable items to the dump each month.

“This is never-ending, but I love it,” Beer says. “It’s almost an obsession with us because the need is so great right now.” She says, “You need a coffee pot and can’t get one on a fixed income; I’ve been there.”

Volunteer Bob Ehler has refurbished and given away more than 170 bikes, and a prom dress drive pulled in 150 dresses, which were given away through Pay It Forward as well as to local alternative schools. Anything that Pay It Forward has in excess gets donated to Cottage Grove Community Sharing, most recently five boxes of shoes and 30 or 40 coats, Beer says.

The group has twice-monthly drop-off and pick-up days on the first and third Sundays of each month from 1 to 5 pm at Beer’s home. “Everyone in town knows where I live,” she laughs.

Dec. 21 was one of the last big exchange days until the end of January because Neil is having brain surgery to have a tumor removed. Beer says that there is only a 3 percent chance her daughter has cancer, but the surgery itself is “very invasive” and Neil will need time to heal, and Beer, who also works for a private dog rescue, will care for Neil’s two young children, ages 1 and 2.

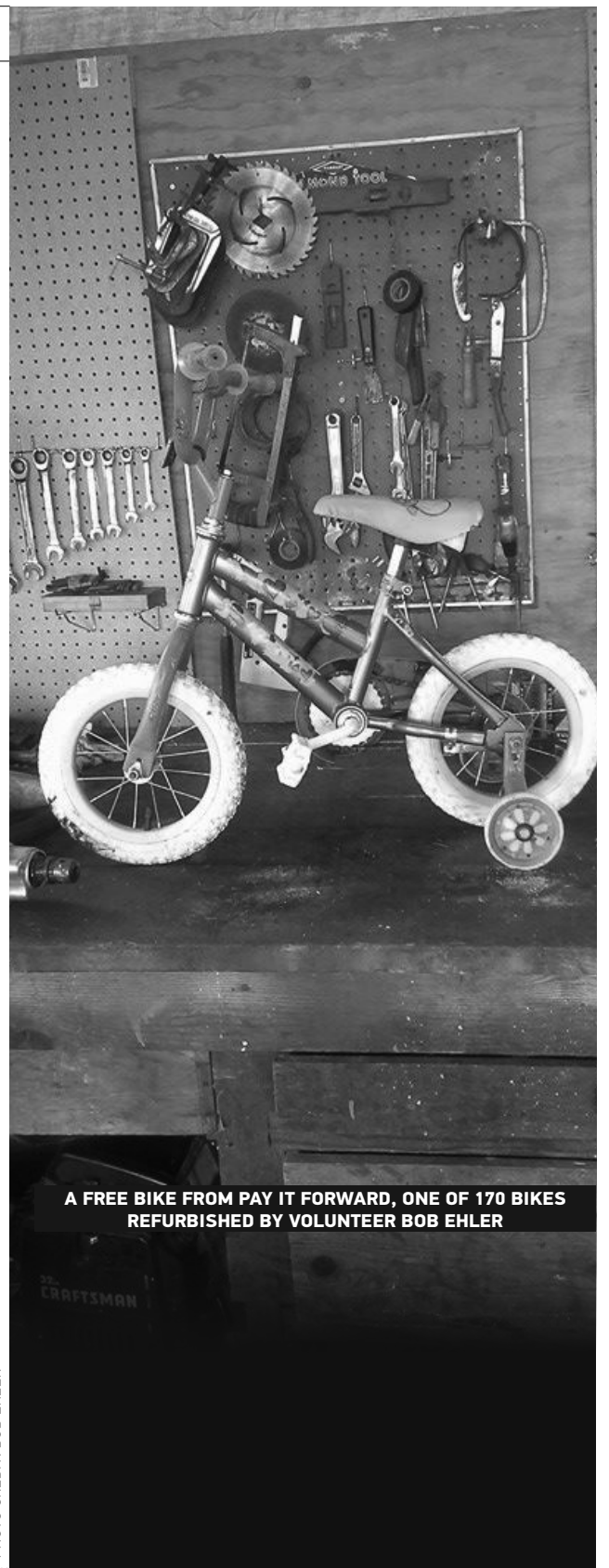
One of the most memorable donations, she says, was to a homeless man who came in an RV to get a coat. “A lot of homeless come for the coats,” she says. They found his RV was just an empty shell with nothing in it. The group “totally equipped his motorhome,” Beer says, with towels, dishware, blankets and more. They even found him a digital camera to take photos of the jewelry he makes to help him promote and sell his wares.

Beer says the Facebook page will stay up and running while her daughter recovers, and Pay It Forward plans to open an auction page after the holidays to do some fundraising for its work.

To participate in Pay It Forward Cottage Grove, go to the Facebook page at wkly.ws/1v9, call 946-3901 or email PayItForwardCottageGrove@gmail.com. — *Camilla Mortensen*

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— MINDY BEER



A FREE BIKE FROM PAY IT FORWARD, ONE OF 170 BIKES REFINISHED BY VOLUNTEER BOB EHLER

PHOTO CREDIT: BOB EHLER

OUTDATED 4J SCIENCE BOOKS TO BE REPLACED, BUT NEW CURRICULUM YEARS AWAY

The Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) may sound like a sci-fi TV show, but they’re actually the name of Oregon’s new science standards for public schools, passed earlier this year. Is Eugene School District 4J ready for them? Well, not yet. Not even close.

In fact, some schools still have 20-year-old science curriculum, like Kelly Middle School, where science teacher Dustin Dawson wrote his own curriculum to compensate for the district’s outmoded materials. The outd books were written before the first human genome was sequenced and before the Large Hadron Collider was built.

4J is in the middle of revamping its curriculum adoption process after the tumultuous “grassroots” introduction of College Preparatory Mathematics (CPM) curriculum that took place over the past few years, in which the district spent nearly \$470,000 in bond and general funds without officially adopting the curriculum, despite criticism from parents and teachers.

Science is next on the list of new curriculum adoptions, which are supposed to occur every seven years, but as 4J

reworks its process of adoption and the NGSS loom ahead, some teachers worry that time is running out.

“I thought we were much further ahead than we are,” says Dawson, who spoke at a Dec. 17 board meeting to express his concern about the outdated science curriculum, which might take years to replace after piloting with teachers and negotiating with publishers.

At the Dec. 17 board meeting, the 4J school board officially approved the process to move forward with the science curriculum adoption while continuing to restructure the overall curriculum adoption procedure in what 4J Superintendent Sheldon Beran calls a “parallel process.”

4J’s STEM education administrator Kim Finch said she plans to assemble a 35- to 40-person task force to help provide guidance in crafting a vision for 4J’s K-12 science curriculum. She added that it will take another year until elementary schools are ready to pilot.

Dawson says the district told him at the beginning of this school year that he would receive two pilot units to test in his classroom, but he only received his first unit a few weeks ago. “I thought I was middle of the pack, but at the meeting I realized they haven’t even lined up all the teachers who are going to pilot yet.”

Dawson tells *EW* that he’s excited about the new standards and thinks their process-driven approach is an improvement on simply memorizing facts — students are now encouraged to think analytically and solve problems, much like a real scientist would. He’s eager to start piloting science lessons, but he says he’s not sure the district can accomplish a full science curriculum adoption before

students are tested on the new standards.

“If the new test comes in the next two to three years and we don’t have curriculum that is geared toward NGSS, that will hurt [students] because they won’t be familiar

with any of that material. It’s just not to the same depth.”

Dawson says he’d like to see 4J using new curriculum by the beginning of the 2016-17 school year, but he also thinks that assembling 35 to 40 people to develop a 4J science vision might slow things down if teachers have to wait for 4J to develop that vision before they can start piloting.

“It’s possible,” he says, “but it will take a lot of effort and energy.”

— *Amy Schneider*

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— DUSTIN DAWSON, SCIENCE TEACHER