

# Eugene man helps save unwanted items from landfills

By ADAM DUVERNAY  
The Register-Guard

If it didn't end up in Ward Ricker's storage unit, it would have just been junk. Instead, he's hauling away the things others don't want and giving it away to people who do.

Much of it isn't good enough to donate to thrift stores. But Ricker sees finding a home — other than the dump — for the furniture, household items and all the odds and ends he gathers as a way to reduce overall waste. He's hoping giving away stuff catches on.

Ricker is trying to start a free store, where everything costs shoppers exactly nothing.

Just about every Sunday since April, Ricker has been opening a storage unit in Eugene to anyone who wants some free stuff. Ricker's main objective is to intercept items otherwise bound for the landfill by giving it all away to people who want and need them.

"I'm concerned about waste issues," Ricker said. "We're using up all our resources, wasting them so future generations won't have them. We're putting all our waste in these horrible, toxic piles we call landfills, and it's just not right. We shouldn't be doing that to our children and grandchildren and great-grandchildren. It's just wrong."

Ricker stocks his free stuff storage locker with the things he's hauled away since he started a junk removal business last December, a venture he said began as a way to learn more about waste.



No Waste Eugene volunteer Shannon Wellborn, left, and founder Ward Ricker pause on a recent Sunday outside the storage unit that's being used as a free store to rehouse items Ricker hopes to keep out of dumps and landfills.

By April, he was giving the items he hauls away for free and hoping to spark the development of a nonprofit organization dedicated to cost-free shopping.

Ricker gets paid to haul away junk, but he said clients are often pleased to learn their old things won't just be tossed in the dump. Now he wants to take it to the next step.

Ricker is thinking about calling the future organization "No Waste Eugene."

"Furniture, houseware, dishes, there's electronic stuff, tools, hardware, books. Most of the stuff I haul off I think is reusable," Ricker

said. "Let's have a place where people can take it rather than the dump, what I'm calling 'in-between waste' good enough people will use it if you give it to them but that thrift stores don't want and ends up in the dump."

Danielle Sirota visited Ricker's weekly giveaways for a simple reason.

"I like free stuff," Sirota said.

Sirota said she takes only a few things, such as an alarm clock or a new push cart. She said it's no surprise the unwanted items get scooped up quick — she sees it all the time.

"People throw away so much. Even at my apartment building, they will put it out by the dumpster and then it will all just disappear," Sirota said.

"Free stores," where donated items are given away cost-free, have been around for decades, sometimes as occasional pop-up events and sometimes inside a storefront. They can be charity-driven or focused on creating social or environmental solutions.

Everyone is invited to Ricker's giveaways, though the first hour is reserved for shoppers of limited financial means, he said. The events are held between 10 a.m. and

1 p.m. Sundays. Those seeking early entry are asked to

call Ricker at 541-650-4662 to schedule beforehand.

Ricker hopes the weekly giveaways generate enough interest and attention that others see the value in setting up a free store as a non-profit with a physical location. But that idea is in its infancy, Ricker said, and for now it's just him and, sometimes, volunteers.

Shannon Wellborn, one of those volunteers, said she always has visited sharing and giveaway events as a cheap alternative to buying items like books new or even used.

But after her first visit to Ricker's storage unit, she said she was eager to help out.

"I was just so enamored," Wellborn said. "It might just look like a storage unit full of trash to you, but when you don't have any means for anything it's a wonderful resource."

Ricker recently moved the location of his free giveaways. He now hosts them Sundays at Quail's Nest Mini Storage in Eugene.

## State's summer heat a warning of what's to come

By MONICA SAMAYOA  
Oregon Public Broadcasting

The Pacific Northwest endured some of the hottest temperatures ever recorded last June, with some areas in Oregon reaching as high as 118 degrees Fahrenheit.

On June 28, Portland saw an all-time record high temperature of 116 degrees. Other areas nearby in the state also hit all-time record highs and felt the excessive heat. The cause? A high pressure system settled over the region, forming a "heat dome" that trapped hot air over the region from June 24 to June 29.

June's unprecedented heat didn't just send people into a frenzy to buy portable AC units. It also delivered a brutal wake-up call that climate change is here.

For more than two centuries the global burning of fossil fuels like coal and petroleum has released carbon into the atmosphere, trapping heat and warming the planet. Glaciers are melting, sea levels are rising, storms are becoming more extreme. And the types of once in a lifetime extreme heat events that occurred in the Northwest last summer are expected to become more common.

That's according to Oregon State University professor and climatologist Chris Daly, among others. He called the heat dome frightening and unexpected — not just because of the extreme temperatures, but also because it hit the region just as summer was arriving. Residents had no time to get acclimated to the warmer summer months. Overnight temperatures were also the highest lows ever recorded during this time, leaving little to no relief from the excessive heat during the day.

"Back then in the 1990s, it was pretty common knowledge that summer didn't start until after the 4th of July," Daly said. "What I'm seeing in the last few years, not every year ... summer has started early."

Daly, who has created 30-year climate model maps to predict weather forecasts, said new models show there has been a 1-degree Fahrenheit increase in the Pacific Northwest during the months of July and August. He also

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Chris Daly | Oregon State University professor and climatologist

said the climate models also show a 30% to 50% decrease in summer rain.

"That's pretty substantial," Daly said. "We don't get much in the summer anyway, so the actual numbers are kind of small. But if you figure that we were getting maybe an inch and a half in precipitation in July and August, that's maybe cut by a half or by a third."

The warming temperatures and drier weather are a double whammy for plants, trees and animals that depend on that water during those summer months, Daly said. But he doesn't expect the region will experience the heat intensity every year.

"I think that what we're seeing are warning signs of things to come and we need

to start preparing to deal with these events that we call unusual now becoming more and more commonplace," he said.

The Northwest's lack of readiness brought deadly consequences. According to the Oregon State Medical Examiner's Office's official count, 96 people died from heat related illnesses during that time, with 69 of those deaths occurring in Multnomah County.

More than half of those who died in Multnomah County were older adults. Many of them were found alone in their homes. None of those who died had central air and only eight had a portable air conditioning unit, according to the county.

Recent data also shows a

drastic increase in the amount of people seeking emergency help. According to Multnomah County's Healthy Homes and Communities Supervisor Brendon Haggerty, during a normal summer in Multnomah county about 100 people visit emergency rooms for heat related illnesses. During just the few days of the heat dome event, he said hospitals saw more than 150 heat-related visits.

Earlier in the year, Oregon Occupational Safety and Health Division, or Oregon OSHA, started working on rules to protect people who work outside of climate-controlled settings during a heat wave or a wildfire smoke event. When the heat wave hit the region, advocates called on the agency to adopt temporary rules after a farmworker died from heat-related illness on a farm north of Salem on June 26. At least three workers died of heat related illnesses while on the job due to the June heat wave.

In August, Oregon OSHA adopted two new temporary rules that include providing and ensuring workers have access to shade, cool drinking water, and providing extra breaks to cool down if temperatures exceed 90 degrees.

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