

Bustling “Fix-It Fair” aims to connect, educate

By Kelly La Croix
The Asian Reporter

The Ockley Green Middle School auditorium was buzzing with the sounds of conversation, sewing machine motors, and clanking tools on the morning of January 26. In one corner of the room, Chuck Quarterman sat at a table with an inflatable reindeer yard decoration in front of him.

“My career was [working on] outdoor power equipment,” explained Chuck as he stripped the insulation off one of the decoration’s wires, “so I did everything from golf course equipment to little string trimmers. I’ve always been kind of a fix-it guy.”

Chuck and many others like him volunteer their time with Repair PDX, a grassroots organization dedicated to bringing repair events — also known as Repair Cafés — to the Portland metropolitan area. It was one of many features at the day’s “Fix-It Fair.”

“Fix-It Fairs” are free events held by the City of Portland’s Bureau of Planning and Sustainability (BPS) that aim to connect attendees with resources and educate them about simple ways to save money. There are currently three fairs held per year, all of which are hosted by local public schools. The schools provide the necessary space to house such a large event, as a typical fair may feature more than 60 exhibitors and about 24 hourly workshops, in addition to other services.

Upon entering the middle school, attendees were greeted at a multilingual information booth and given the day’s schedule. Then they perused the exhibitions and signed up for workshops.

In an effort to make the event feel less formidable, attendees received a brochure created by BPS that summarized most of the offerings, which were grouped into seven categories: weatherization; health and nutrition; water and energy savings; money savings; recycling; yard and garden care; and community resources.

The “Do It Yourself Weatherization” workshop highlighted ways to keep homes warm by sealing outlets, windows, and



doors. Health and nutrition booths handed out information about aging, stress management, and diabetes prevention. Water and energy savings exhibitors featured free faucet attachments to help conserve water use and offered a workshop

aimed at helping people understand Portland’s home energy score in order to make energy-efficient choices.

Booths related to money savings included some that distributed material to first-time homebuyers and an all-day

FREE “FIX-IT FAIRS.” The City of Portland’s “Fix-It Fairs” connect residents with money-saving, environmentally friendly resources through free workshops and exhibits. The event features a Repair Café (top photo) as well as information on home and personal health, food and nutrition, community resources, recycling, lead testing, utility savings (bottom photo), and more. (AR Photos/Jan Landis)

workshop focused on financial planning. Certified master recyclers answered questions on where and how to recycle items. Among other exhibitors in the recycling category was Free Geek, an organization that takes donated technology and reuses it to educate its patrons, recycles it by exchanging computers for performing community service, and resells it to the general public.

The booths that centered on yard and garden care offered brochures on native plants, composting tips, and giveaways of vegetable and flower seeds. Popular workshops included “Intro to Rain Gardens” and “Building a Backyard Habitat on a Budget.”

Exhibitors in the community resources category included the North Portland Tool Library — one of several libraries in the area that allows residents to borrow tools at no cost — and Resourceful PDX, who created maps that list resale shops, donation centers, lending libraries, and more.

Emergency-preparedness organizations also fell under the community resources heading. Their displays included literature on how to prepare for and survive disasters. A few outlying exhibitors and workshops did not fall distinctly into a single category. These included ones that dealt with “green cleaning” or making do-it-yourself (DIY) cleaning solutions using safe ingredients, which encompassed both money savings and health. In addition to all of this, the fair also featured hourly door prizes, lunch, on-site professional childcare, and the aforementioned Repair Café, which also provided free minor bike tune-ups and repairs in partnership with Bikes 4 Humanity.

Back in the auditorium, Chuck was

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