Furniture Project Saves Tons of Waste, Thousands of Dollars

11/17/2015

SUNY Cortland's Residence Life and Housing is finding new ways to turn perfectly usable "trash" into treasure by carrying out a sustainable furniture refurbishing project that will save an estimated $150,000.

The project set out to extend the lifespan on lightly used desks in the Casey and Smith Tower residence halls without having to buy new ones. Besides the overall cost savings created by not purchasing new desks, the furniture facelift also benefited the environment. Roughly 21.25 tons of waste — or 42,500 pounds — were saved from going into landfills. That disposal also would have sent approximately 33 tons of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. Consider, too, that enough energy was saved to power 17 homes for a full year just from avoiding the manufacturing process.

"A lot of the desks were still in good condition, they just needed to be polished up," said the project's initiator, Katie Ingraham, assistant director of operations for Residence Life and Housing. "We wanted to maintain the furniture in our residence halls instead of waste it in a landfill."

Right Price Companies, a furniture company in Syracuse, N.Y., stepped in to redo the desks.

Ingraham, who has found many ways to champion environmentally sustainable initiatives in her work, also oversees the "Green Reps" program that puts an environmentally conscious student in every residence hall. Together these efforts result in a more eco-friendly campus.

"I wanted to take the time to do the right thing instead of taking the easy way out," said Ingraham, who has worked at the College for four years.

When Right Price Companies first started the project last summer, it determined about 250 steel and 150 wooden desks could be renewed in total. The several step process consisted of: taking the desks apart, sanding them down, recoating them with polyurethane and then putting them back together.

Two of the 400 desks before they were refurbished. The process consisted of taking the desks apart, sanding, recoating with polyurethane and reassembling.

The hutches that sit on top of the desks also were replaced, with tack boards and LED light fixtures added.

Jeff Detor, the Right Price Companies representative who worked closely on the project, said the remanufacturing process puts a good product back into the field without wasting resources.

"We wanted to help (SUNY Cortland) be a good pillar of sustainable products," Detor said.

That much is reflected in the work of Residence Life and Housing. "Everything is replaceable in today's world," Ingraham said. "When something can be repurposed, we should be making the effort to do so."

Right Price Companies, Inc.

Prepared by public relations intern Brandon Romagnoli