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## Goodwill starts rehabbing medical equipment

By Robin Brown



At Goodwill's new durable medical equipment store, supervisor Jason Burns helps Leroy Phillips, a 77-year-old from Laurel, get a wheelchair lift. / THE NEWS JOURNAL/FRED COMGYS

Goodwill has branched out with an innovative new [business](#) that has big potential for growth.

And it's a new kind of recycling for 90-year-old Goodwill of Delaware and Delaware County, Pa., extending its founding concept of "giving a hand up instead of a hand out."

The nonprofit has launched a [new business](#) of refurbishing and selling durable medical equipment such as canes, crutches, hospital beds, wheelchairs and scooters for adults and children.

It takes gently used -- and tax-deductible -- public donations at its stores and worked out an agreement with Delaware Medicaid and Medical Assistance to receive equipment that was purchased with Medicaid [funds](#) but no longer is being used.



Technician Mario Wootson works on putting a wheelchair back together at Goodwill's new store for durable medical equipment near Wilmington. / THE NEWS JOURNAL/FRED COMEGYS

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The idea came from the University of Delaware's Center for Disabilities Studies. The center got a federal grant to examine the feasibility of the equipment reconditioning, reuse and recycling concept, Goodwill spokesman Ted Sikorski said, adding, "they were looking for someone that could provide the retail aspect."

The project also needed someone with the ability to collect equipment statewide. "That fit in very well with Goodwill," said Colleen Morrone, Goodwill's chief mission officer.

"We have 12 sites throughout the state and we were very well-positioned ... with the transportation already set up and the recycling model in place," she said. "What we added was the sanitation and ability to repair the equipment."

Morrone added, "The ability to make accessibility affordable through an innovative business approach ... is something Goodwill has done for years."

While the nonprofit had recycled equipment, earlier sold at its retail stores "as is," the new business lets Goodwill accept larger items and market them online, she said. It also adds "the ability to pick up donated equipment and deliver equipment that's purchased," she said.

The project provides employment and job training in equipment collection, sorting, reconditioning and repair and sanitizing, Sikorski said, adding every piece is guaranteed safe and working.

In a win-win, the project also promotes the environmentally friendly or "green" ideas of reuse and recycling, Morrone said.

But its "wins" don't stop there.

The business can keep equipment out of landfills and help donors get it out of their attics or closets and back into use. They get tax deductions for donations and a feel-good bonus of helping those in need, who can buy refurbished but certified safe equipment -- notoriously expensive when new -- at affordable prices, Morrone and Sikorski said.

And Goodwill officials say the effort will help "utilize shrinking health care dollars" and serve the aging baby boomer population.

Morrone said the project is partnered with Chimes Delaware "to enable their clients to obtain valuable work experience." That nonprofit has residential and vocational programs statewide for people with a range of cognitive disabilities and specializes in supporting those with developmental disabilities including autism.

Jason Burns, coordinator of the [durable](#) medical equipment project, said the effort so far employs two Goodwill workers and two from Chimes Delaware, as well as a job coach who comes in periodically.

The equipment they refurbish is for sale at a separate, new retail store at 311 E. Lea Blvd., in a strip shopping center near Wilmington, across from Goodwill headquarters. The new shop's hours are 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. weekdays, 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. Saturdays.

Typically, Sikorski said, reconditioned items sell for a third to half the price of new equipment.

"It makes accessibility affordable, which can improve somebody's quality of life tremendously," Morrone said.

In another [innovation](#), Goodwill has set up an online inventory at [www. goodwillde. org/DME](http://www.goodwillde.org/DME).

Among other items, the site lists walkers at \$20 and \$30, hospital beds from \$400, rails at \$12 up, Hoyer lifts for \$500, blood pressure machines at \$25 and canes from \$20. Goodwill also has a phone number -- 761-4640 ext. 363 -- for those without Internet access to check about equipment.

Each piece goes through a sanitizing machine that Sikorski said is "bigger than a dishwasher, but smaller than a [car](#) wash."

Then they're wrapped for protection in transportation, he added.

The effort is the latest addition to Goodwill efforts to improve life for those with barriers to work and self-sufficiency. Beyond its well-known stores, Goodwill has a last-chance shop for their unsold goods, auctions and online sales, and two other businesses -- Goodwill Janitorial Services and Goodwill Staffing Services -- to provide jobs, training and work experience, as well as services for the community.

Aside from donations, Burns said, the new equipment business has one main need: "We just need to let more people know about it."

And the partnership with the UD Center for Disabilities Studies aims to grow and become self- sustaining, Sikorski said. A step toward that is developing partnerships with assisted-living sites and other nonprofits, he said, but "it's going to take some time."

For now, though, the business is moving right along and its employees are [fast](#) at work.

To look in on them, he said, "It's like Santa's workshop for medical equipment."

<http://www.delawareonline.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=2011112190318>