



Farmer's Market founder pushes Westford green effort

By Rachel R. Briere, Lowell Sun

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WESTFORD -- One man's trash is Westford students' treasure.

As part of a new collaboration, a handful of residents is turning trash into cash. It's an effort to go green while getting green.

Gloria Gilbert, founder of the Westford Farmer's Market, recently launched Sustainable Westford -- a nonprofit platform created to organize local groups with the common goal of promoting green initiatives.

"There are many groups covering a range of topics including water pollution, organic farming to alternative energy however there is not one platform. They're spread out all over the place," Gilbert said. "I wanted to partner with local programs with the same mission as ours -- to create an eco-friendly and vibrant Westford."

One of the first programs Gilbert teamed up with in town is Upcycle It! created by fellow resident Kristina Greene. The initiative collects non-recyclable items such as chip bags, candy-bar wrappers, coffee bags and juice pouches in a number of drop-off bins around town. The bins are collected weekly and then sent to Terracycle, an international company that takes the "trash" and makes it into a number of products.

Skittles wrappers become an insulated cooler tote bag. Crushed computers and fax machines are morphed into flower pots. Circuit boards are reused as clipboards and drink coasters. Oreo Cookie packaging is transformed into a kite and much more.

The innovative "recycling" is not the only benefit to Westford. Each piece of trash that's collected and sent in is worth anywhere from two cents for chip bags to 25 cents for cell phones. All the money Greene collects from Upcycle It! is then donated back to Westford schools.

Collection bins have been placed in Starbucks on Littleton Road and a number of schools. The Farmer's Market on the Town Common, which opens June 22, will also be a drop point for the non-recyclable products. Gilbert is hoping its popularity catches on.

"We really want to get it into the schools," she said.

Gilbert founded the Farmers Market three years ago. She describes it as a "classic market with much more than just produce."

Every Tuesday from 2:30-6:30 p.m. through Oct. 23, the market attracts a number of people for locally-grown fruits and vegetables, fresh fish, bread, pastries and other specialty foods. The weekly gathering also features exhibits by artists, music and free educational programs.

She explained that "going green" really starts with the children in the community. Gilbert says her goal is to develop more interactive education in an effort to teach kids that it is important for the future of the world to take care of the environment.

"By putting an emphasis on educating the children before for example they go buy their first car -- they can purchase a green car, or at least think about it," she said.

Gilbert said the trendy movement to be "green" is mostly just talk. While it's growing in popularity, she says people like her are still in the minority.

"People are not green, that's just the way it is," she said. "I don't live completely green and won't be able to, but with kids we can do better. We can teach them that items have another use and get them interested in, well, trash."