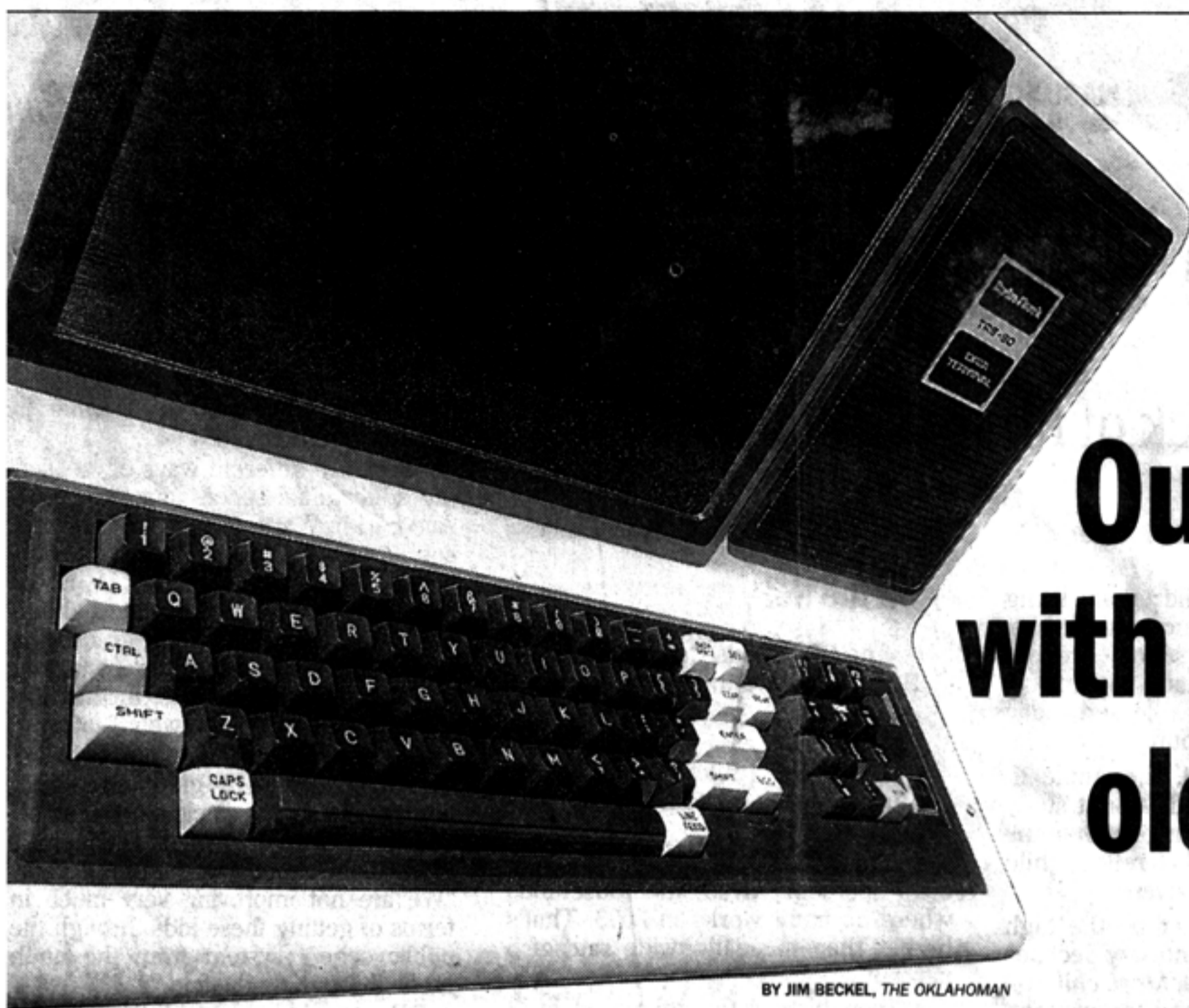


YOUR BUSINESS



BY JIM BECKEL, THE OKLAHOMAN

Out with the old

Tulsa electronics recycler provides disposal options

By Ja'Rena Lunsford
Business Writer

TULSA — Mountains of gadgets and watcha-ma-call-its from the past and present line various floor space at Natural Evolution.

The Tulsa company is home to forgotten Atari game consoles, fax machines, telephones, computers and tons — literally tons — of other obsolete electronics ready for recycling. Traci and Chris Phillips began Natural Evolution in January 2003 and are expecting to recycle 3.5 million pounds of electronics this year alone.

"Most people don't realize it's an option," President Traci Phillips said. Phillips said although the industry is fairly new, awareness is growing.

Natural Evolution's landfill-free recycling process is labor intensive and consists of dismantling items and separating materials, such as plastics, aluminum, stainless steel and wire. Natural Evolution also removes mercury, lithium and other materials that may be hazardous. The company also sanitizes or destroys all hard drives.

"There is a process," Traci Phillips said. "It may not look like it, but there is." She said an employee can dismantle four to five central processing units in an hour.

About 12 percent to 15 percent of the components are resold. Natural Evolution has an eBay site and also sells to metal buyers.

"We don't just blindly destroy ev-

Natural Evolution

■ **Address:** 5719 E 13 Street, Tulsa.

■ **Web site:** natural evolution.com.

■ The National Safety Council study predicts over 300 million personal computers will need to be recycled over the next four years.

■ The Environmental Protection Agency estimates that 80 percent of all discarded computer systems find their way into landfills.

From Staff Reports

ery piece that comes in," operations manager Chris Phillips said.

Natural Evolution is nonfee-based, giving people who would normally store their old rotary telephone in the hall closet the opportunity to discard it in a more environmentally efficient way. Chris Phillips said about 11 million monitors will be discarded this year in the United States. He said when a monitor breaks, the lead can become airborne. There are about 6 pounds of lead in a monitor. Over time, he said, a landfill could end up with 1 million pounds of lead.

"The reality is, handling this stuff properly makes sense," he said.

The Oklahoma Department of

Environmental Quality took notice of Natural Evolution's handling of obsolete electronics. In June, the department selected the recycling company as the first facility to receive Gold OKStar recognition. The department developed the OKStar program to recognize facilities that achieve and maintain compliance and go beyond the regulations to protect the environment and promote employee safety.

Department of Environmental Quality spokeswoman Monty Elder said she was happy to see a company realize the importance of electronics recycling.

Natural Evolution has more than 100 clients, many of whom have been paying hundreds of dollars in storage for items they will never use.

"Businesses will end up with storerooms full of stuff," Traci Phillips said.

Tulsa Public Schools was the company's first client. Traci Phillips said Natural Evolution reduced the school system's cost by 50 percent. She said many businesses pay for electronic disposal, which can range from 30 to 45 cents per pound — monitors weigh 18 to 40 pounds.

Phillips said Natural Evolution also was able to eliminate Tulsa Public Schools' liability. Liability issues include data, security and materials, all of which may come into play if computers are just dumped.

"People will drive hours just because they don't want their computers in a landfill," Traci Phillips said.

Unlike many companies, Natural Evolution wants to keep its facility under 50,000 square feet. The Phillipses said they want to be able to keep their overhead low and move the equipment in and out quickly.

"If you don't stay on top of things, you yourself turn into the company you just cleaned out," Chris Phillips said.



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Left: Traci and Chris Phillips sit among nearly 1,500 computer monitors in their Tulsa warehouse. **Above:** A Radio Shack model TRS-80 data terminal is among the many items that Traci and Chris Phillips have in their Tulsa warehouse.