



Tracy LeGrand photo
MONITOR MOUNTAIN
— Traci Phillips, Natural Evolutions Inc. president, poses atop a pile of 1,500 computer monitors occupying 1,000 sq. ft. within the company's 24,000 sq. ft. warehouse.

From trash to trea\$ure

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The mountain of computer monitors represents obsolete equipment piled in company storerooms everywhere.

Natural Evolutions Inc., a two-year-old business, nearly hit the \$1 million mark in 2004 by helping solve the problem. They haul away unwanted computers — free.

“We’re the only non-fee based electronics recycling company in the city,” said Traci Phillips, president. “I believe we are the only one in the state.”

Currently, nine NEI employees demanufacture and categorize materials ranging from the computer-so-old-it-has-whiskers to the car-sized 1960s copy machine to obsolete science classroom equipment.

Depending on the type and/or quality of material received, each item enters one of two processing streams — reallocation or demanufacturing.

If reallocated, all owner identification tags are removed and working drives wiped clean. From there it is donated to nonprofits or resold either in entirety or parts.

Each disassembled computer grosses the company about \$4, Phillips said. “We look down to the penny for each item. And we have to do a lot of volume for this to work.”

Antiquated equipment represents huge costs in both storage and liability potential.

“The national average cost per square foot of storage for each (obsolete) PC is

\$200 per year,” Phillips said, quoting her research. “In urban areas that cost can be as much as \$800 per square foot.”

Corporations are liable for any assets until liability has been released either by title or written agreement, she said.

Environmental considerations are a motivation.

“Lead is just one environmental factor among many,” she said. “Lead poses an environmental hazard when it’s incinerated or put in landfills.”

Computers contain up to 6.3 percent lead and make up 25 percent of the weight of a 15- to 90-lb. computer, according to the Environmental Protection Agency.

The company has handled more than two million pounds of material to date.

“We will dispose of and even purchase excess electronic inventory,” she said. “Depending on the inventory, timeframe and other mitigating factors, a program can be designed to best meet client



Traci Phillips

requirements and alleviate the immediate pressures and costs. We’ll also provide a plan for the future disposal of equipment as obsolescence is reached.”

Phillips and her partners — husband Chris and brother-in-law Greg — believe NEI will do \$3 to \$5 million in business a year in the coming year, based on demand for their services. “We have handled more than two million pounds of materials to date,” she said.

Initial inspiration for NEI came in the form of parking meters.

“My family has owned B.B. Autoparks downtown since my great grandfather started it in 1929,” Phillips said. “Mom wanted her warehouse cleaned out and we found some automated meters from the early 1980s.”

After disassembling the meters and using the parts for art projects, Phillips and her husband became curious about the electronics side of the recycling industry. Layoffs from the telecommunications and gas and oil industries spurred that interest into their current occupation.

NEI employees enjoy an usual perk. “We hope to continue to feed our employees lunch even when we grow to 30 to 50 people,” she laughed, describing her policy of providing a midday meal for staff. “It’s a great way to unwind and get to know one another better. We can’t yet provide some of the perks that bigger companies do but we can do this for them and we enjoy it.”