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Evanston ReBuilding Warehouse is Building a Better World

These days, all **Lou Dickson** is missing is her superhero cape. But if you give her enough time, she can fashion one from the materials she has stored in her Evanston ReBuilding Warehouse.

Since May 2011, the Evanston ReBuilding Warehouse (ERW) has diverted tens of thousands of tons of construction material away from landfills by repurposing them for future use. Today, Dickson and her team of volunteers operate an 11,000-square-foot warehouse at Evanston's west end, storing usable materials from deconstructed and renovated buildings.

Dickson worked as a general contractor for over 20 years, specializing in restoring pre-1920s homes. Increasingly frustrated with turning usable materials from projects over to the dumpster, she began salvaging and storing quality resources; she opened the warehouse just six months after her last job as a contractor, and, with the help of a three-year Root2Fruit capacity building grant from the Evanston Community Foundation, ERW is now an entirely self-sufficient nonprofit.

In addition to keeping building materials from the waste stream, ERW is committed to improving the lives of local residents as well. With Dickson's background in contracting and a steady stream of dedicated volunteers, ERW is able to act as a subcontractor for remodeling jobs or partial stripping of homes set for deconstruction.





Through its green jobs training initiative, the Evanston ReBuilding Workforce, ERW offers multiple job training programs for individuals struggling with employment, including a seven-month long comprehensive training course in deconstruction. By using the ERW warehouse as a “learning laboratory,” participants receive on-the-job training they can put to good use doing deconstruction work in North Shore homes. The curriculum teaches not only the hard skills of deconstruction but also trains individuals to secure and keep jobs by addressing the behavioral, educational and physical health challenges one might face. For their first month, trainees work side-by-side with trained professionals to learn the necessary skills before embarking on six months of on-the-job mentor training.

“One of the things I am most proud of is our workforce training,” Dickson says. “We have conducted two classes in warehousing, with most of the trainees getting jobs. We have now embarked on a new workforce training in deconstruction with trainees that have significant barriers to employment and are chronically unemployed or underemployed.”

To date, ERW has conducted three workforce training classes, including two in collaboration with Evanston’s Connections for the Homeless; all of the attendees were formerly or presently homeless, low-income or ex-offenders. Seventy percent of recent trainees are now working successfully. Evanston ReBuilding Workforce has grown into a collaborative community effort with other Evanston partners, including McGaw YMCA, Howard Area Community Center, Youth Job Center and Opportunity Advancement Innovation, Inc.

Dickson hopes the building material reuse warehouse and its unique approach will continue to grow as Evanston does. “Deconstruction and reuse of building materials is still quite a new concept in this area,” she says. “Basically, it’s where recycling was 20 or 25 years ago.”

The warehouse additionally hosts education workshops for contracting professionals, including education on Cook County’s new mandatory Debris Diversion Ordinance; continuing education for architects focused on restoring brick and mortar; and various do-it-yourself workshops for residents. ERW is also available to help residents understand how to take a house down or remodel, while still keeping materials out of landfills.

In the market for a renovation? Stop by the Evanston ReBuilding Warehouse at 2101 Dempster Street, and shop its treasure trove of unique, quality building materials, ranging from the late 19th century to brand new, at affordable prices. Or consider donating your used materials; donations of viable materials qualify for a tax reduction.

For more information about volunteer opportunities, call the Evanston ReBuilding Warehouse Tuesday through Saturday, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. at 847-864-9246.

“And if anyone has a lift-gate truck to donate,” Dickson adds, “we wouldn’t stop smiling for months.”



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