

Seconds, please

High-end kitchens live again for a good cause

By LYNN WOODS



Steve Feldman left his job as a marketing manager at two radio stations in Rhode Island to raise funds for All Addicts Anonymous, a 12-step program with national headquarters in the Sullivan County town of Hankins. Trying to get donations was a difficult task, given that it was 2001 and the economy was doing badly. But when Feldman happened to drive past the demolition of the former empress of Iran's 10,000-square-foot home during a visit to a donor in Greenwich, he got an idea: Why not rescue the expensive, barely used kitchens from mansions destined for the wrecking ball and resell them in outlet stores at a discount, using the proceeds for the charity?

Seven years later, Green Demolitions, the nonprofit organization he subsequently started, is a smashing success. The group resells not only luxury kitchens but also bath fixtures, lighting, home décor, cars, boats, musical instruments, high-end clothing and jewelry, doors, windows, and heating units at three outlet stores, located in Norwalk, Honesdale, Pa., and Bethel.

Since its launch with seed money from a donor in 2005, Green Demolitions has raised more than \$400,000 in net proceeds for All Addicts Anonymous. Feldman said the organization is currently averaging 33 donation calls a week, up from 16 in January.

From the beginning, "everything fell into place," he said, recalling that his first big haul was a half a million dollars of kitchen displays from a design studio in New Canaan. He opened a 2,500-square-foot test market store in Hankins in 2006 and quickly discovered there was a brisk market for the discounted kitchens among second-home owners in the Hudson Valley. "The president of a large retail chain from Millbrook came to buy a kitchen, as well as attorneys from Tivoli," he said.

Shortly after, Feldman opened a space twice as large in Honesdale, which is a popular shopping area for residents of western Sullivan County, partnering with a local businessman who bought the building. The openings in Bethel and Norwalk followed (they replaced the smaller store in Hankins and one that had been operating in Black Rock), resulting in a total

21,000 square feet of retail space. Major hauls included three truckloads of kitchens from KBIS, the Kitchen and Bath Industry Show, held in Las Vegas. The pool of donors has expanded from homeowners to builders, designers, retailers, and wholesale manufacturers, including some from the luxury-appliance industry.

Most donations come from Fairfield and Westchester counties, although items are also being hauled in from Manhattan, the Hamptons and northern New Jersey. There are 18 employees, including a number of recovering addicts from All Addicts and their family members. Green Demolitions has a fleet of three trucks and subcontracts to a trucking company when additional wheels are needed.

Feldman said the group markets to the construction industry and design community through its membership in a number of trade organizations. It also gets a lot of pro bono advertising in print and on TV and radio. In addition, Feldman gets invited to fundraisers and events by other nonprofits, such as the Greenwich Land Trust, helping raising Green Demolitions' profile. "There are a lot of synergies with businesses and other nonprofits," he said.

Green Demolitions benefits donors, consumers and the environment. The donors get a tax deduction and free removal of their waste. A Dumpster with the capacity to hold a large kitchen costs about \$600, Feldman noted, so the savings are substantial. Obviously, less waste is sent to landfills, helping cut down on construction debris, which constitutes 30 percent of overall waste.

Consumers can purchase a fancy kitchen for 50 percent to 75 percent off the retail price, while increasing the equity of their homes. Industry professionals, contractors and designers can offer their clients discounts by installing a nearly new kitchen or bathroom.

Then there's the self-sustaining stream of funds Green Demolitions provides to All Addicts Anonymous. "The charity earns its own money through entrepreneurship," Feldman said. "This is the new model: charities buying franchises and promoting social entrepreneurship. We're creating an industry."

Feldman has diversified to exhibit booths from trade shows. "Whole exhibit booths get thrown out, which in Las Vegas amounts to 800,000 square feet of exhibit space," Feldman said. "Home Depot gave us its booth from an AARP show in Boston, which they only used twice. It was worth \$300,000." Most of the contents of the booth can be sold in the Green Demolitions stores, with the booths being resold through national trade association brokers.

He would like to expand the organization in the future, first to the New York metropolitan area, which he believes could support six stores, and then to Boston, Philadelphia and Baltimore-Washington. He would also like to attract a green angel, someone who would "give us \$1 million, which I'll turn into \$10 million." Preferably it would be a donation, although Feldman is considering an investment model.

"Our timing is excellent," he said. However, he acknowledged, running the nonprofit is "a lot of work. It's very complicated to keep the inventory and the customers flowing. But because we're a charity, we get tremendous help."