

SHARE & CARE ALIKE

WHAT COLLABORATIVE CONSUMPTION CAN MEAN TO FAMILIES

by Robin Farmer

Caryn Boehm of Henrico County had not heard the term *collaborative consumption*, although her lifestyle defines it. Environmentally aware, Boehm uses Craigslist and other digital resources to save money and trade pre-owned goods.

"We try to live green because it is often easy and economical," says Boehm, whose environmentally responsible initiatives include buying furnishings and clothes from Craigslist for her family. "We also like to minimize our impact on the planet."

While Boehm's decision to recycle resources or give them away is nothing new, what makes her actions part of the collaborative consumption movement is the use of technology, which has expanded the old concepts of lending, bartering, swapping, and renting to a global audience.

In 2010, *Time* magazine selected collaborative consumption among its "ten ideas that will change the world."

Computer-enabled consumers are morphing underutilized resources and assets into new money sources, jobs, and community networks by connecting through peer communities from websites like eBay and Freecycle,

which aims to free up landfills and reduce the manufacturing of new goods. Websites such as Airbnb, for arranging travel accommodations, and Zipcar, a car-sharing company, not to mention Zimride, VCU's social network for ride-sharing, help us travel while being environmentally responsible.

Lighter pockets play a pivotal role in the growing popularity of this social

"We do need to think about the future! If everybody does a little, everybody won't have to give up a lot," says Glynis Boyd Hughes, a Freecycle Network user.

trend some advocates are calling a new economic model. The worldwide economic turmoil of recent years added to the mushrooming use of online platforms by saving consumers money when selling, exchanging, or sharing goods as varied as cars, clothes, textbooks, and houses.

Boehm and other like-minded residents in the Richmond area are reducing

consumerism by sharing resources, which benefits the larger community ultimately. They'll tell you their actions are economical, engaging, educational, earth-friendly, and increasingly embraced.

"Richmond is definitely getting greener," said Beth Dixon of Richmond, who uses Facebook and Twitter to inform people about RVA Swappers, a food and beverage organization she co-founded last year that promotes community, food, and farm-to-table living.

After the birth of her daughter, she became more "interested in what I eat and what I'm feeding my daughter and the impact on the world." She co-founded the organization last summer with Andrea Buono and hopes to attract fifty new *swappers* at the next event this spring.

Another green initiative commonly taken for granted by practitioners involves the swapping of clothes. Second-hand clothing, whether hand-me-downs from relatives and friends or purchased at consignment and thrift stores, eliminates more manufacturing and packaging while saving customers cash.

While the primary purpose of the three thrift stores operated by Richmond

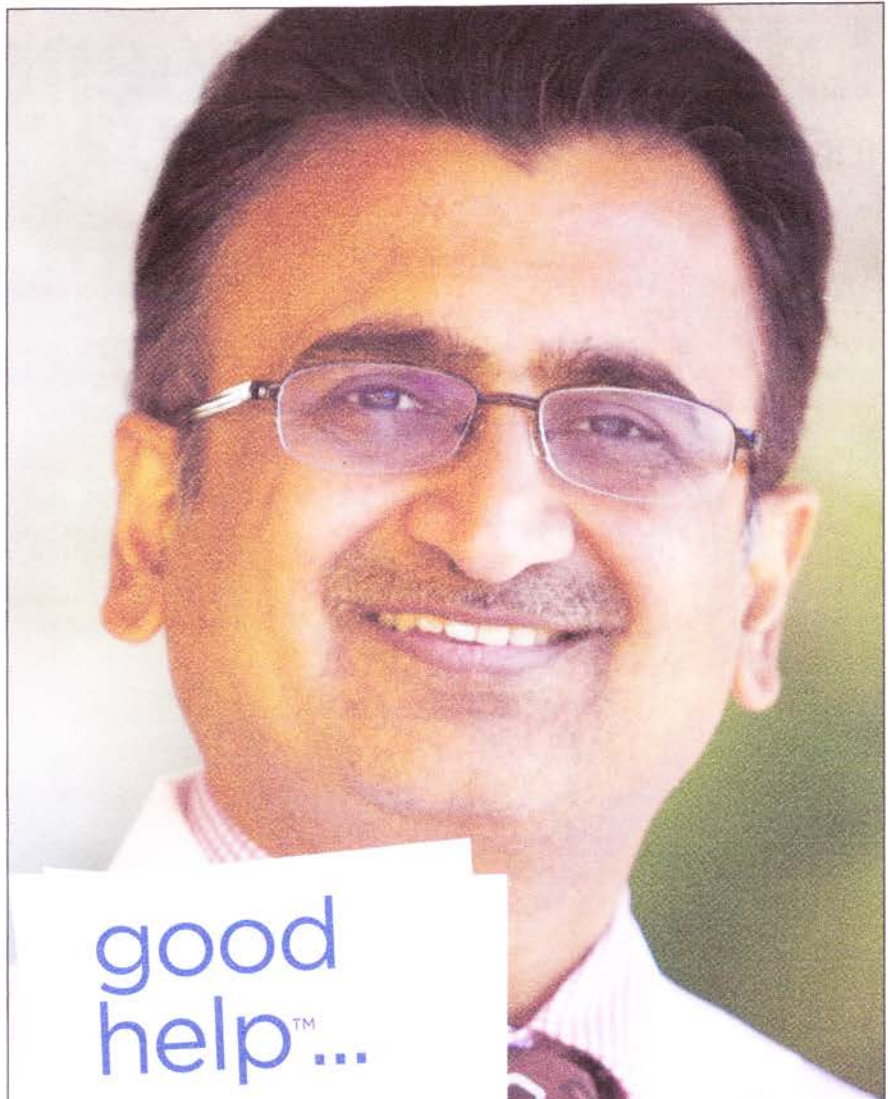


Outreach Center [ROC] is to make merchandise available at low cost and provide revenue to support the group's outreach ministries, the stores also promote green living, says Jeremy Simon, who manages the stores located throughout the Richmond metro area. Unsold items are recycled, which lowers dumping costs, raises cash, and keeps goods out of landfills.

"It started off with us recycling scrap metal," said Simon. "We get eight cents a pound profit, but it's also good for us not to pay to dump it. We pay \$600 every time we dump our giant dumpster" and that money is better used to support programs for people in the inner city and people coming off of drugs and alcohol, he noted.

Green initiatives now include recycling paper products and clothing. "Clothing we cannot sell, we put in our cardboard compressor and baler and make a thousand-pound bale of clothes. We have outside companies that buy clothes for third world countries. They'll come and buy our baled clothes that would have normally ended in a dumpster or landfill and they get sent to third world countries for people who really need clothing," Simon said.

(cont. on page 28)



good help™...

is now in your neighborhood

Bon Secours is pleased to welcome Dr. Anil Kumar to the practice of **Pediatric Endocrinology and Diabetes Associates**, offering treatment of diabetes, obesity, and all endocrine disorders of childhood and adolescence. Now accepting new patients. To learn more visit us at

bonsecours.com

your home for good health



Pediatric Endocrinology and Diabetes Associates
5875 Bremono Road, Suite 207, MOB South
Richmond, VA 23226
804-287-7322



BON SECOURS MEDICAL GROUP

Good Help to Those in Need®

Share & Care Alike

(cont. from page 17)



The ROC stores recycle shoes and other accessories, too. "We have outside companies that buy these items from us. We find companies are recycling these items, shredding them down and making new shoes, belts, and purses out of the recycled materials."

Furniture that can't be sold because of a tear or stain also has a purpose. "We are the only thrift store in Richmond that gives furniture away to people who can't afford it or have had a disaster, like a fire," Simon says. With the recycling, and reuse of clothing, "we were doing green initiatives and didn't know it."

Glynis Boyd Hughes of Hanover County was also among area residents unknowingly practicing collaborative consumption. "A lot of us do things, but we don't use those words," says Hughes, whose desire to live green includes buying eco-friendly products, regifting, and shopping at thrift stores. "I am very big on reusing things. If I buy lunch meat in a container, I keep the container. When she needs new items "before I buy it, I will look at a second-hand store."

Hughes uses Freecycle "to get rid of stuff and find stuff." A former reporter, she has even bartered her professional writing skills. She crafted a resume for her auto mechanic in exchange for an oil change.

Her efforts initially took root as a money-saving measure, but soon blossomed into a way of life as she tries to model healthier living for her grandsons, ages, 7, 10, and 12. "I am teaching my grandchildren, you have to pass it on. Conserve energy and stop waste. That we have to take care of things whether it's our home or outside. The best way to teach is by example."

She and her husband, Gary Hughes,

show all the children they have relationships with that "things don't have to be new to be good. We live in a very consumer-driven society," says Hughes, who saw a bumper sticker recently that sums up her outlook.

"It said: *Live simply so others can simply live.* When we get away from being focused on stuff, we will get quality back in our life. Living green doesn't take much," said Hughes, who uses lemons to shine her faucets. "We do need to think about the future. If everybody does a little, everybody won't have to give up a lot."

Boehm of Henrico agrees.

In addition to using Craigslist to recycle goods, she and her partner grow tomatoes, kale, and other produce in their garden. They purchased worms from Tricycle Gardens to compost kitchen scraps and shredded junk mail to make "a good fertilizer."

She shops at a local farmer's market and feels lucky to have one in her neighborhood. Boehm buys green household products and shops at consignment stores. "Now with my son growing out of his clothes so quickly, we do everything at the consignment shop. When he outgrows a toy in good condition, I take it there and get a credit and get more stuff."

Boehm says she feels a sense of community when she supports local farmers, soap makers, and consignment shops. "Many of the choices we make have just become a habit for us, and we hope green choices just become a way of life for our son."

For the health of her family - and the planet - she plans to do more. "Every year I learn more and go a little deeper into it," says Boehm, who was glad to learn she's a practitioner of one of *Time's* world-changing ideas. ■



Robin Farmer is a freelance journalist who enjoys writing stories that engage, educate, and empower readers. A screenwriter and poet, she resides in Hanover County with her husband, Mike, and a YA novel-in-the-making.

Expert Care. Compassi



40 Physician Spe

Chippenham | Hanover-Memoria
Johnston-Willis | St. Francis |
Hopewell | Kilmarnock

Ortho
After Hou

Providing orthopedic care for accidents and injuries that occur after normal business hours.

5:30pm to 9pm, Mon -

Three Locations: Hanover-Memoria

orthovirginia