

## Habitat Newark's Virtual Re-Store: A Win-Win for All

*By: Carol Manning*

Unlike some Habitat affiliates which run retail outlets where quality used and surplus building materials are sold at a fraction of normal prices, Habitat Newark's Re-Store operates as a virtual store on the internet. In over three years volunteer Julian Blau has generated over \$100,000 in sales for Habitat Newark by marketing donated goods on the eBay online marketplace. Most of the goods sold are quality, reusable kitchen cabinets, appliances, furniture and related items that otherwise might be discarded during a kitchen or home remodel.

**Here's how it works.** Goods for the Re-Store are frequently generated by people with good, reusable cabinets, furniture and appliances who are redoing their kitchen or similar remodeling. When a potential donor calls the Habitat office seeking to donate goods or materials they first talk to Jean Bell, the Habitat office manager, or Fred Powell, our project manager. They notify Julian who calls the potential donor back and makes an appointment to visit and examine the goods for potential resale value.

If, for example, the goods are kitchen cabinets, Julian examines the cabinets for construction and materials. He inventories and photographs them so that bidders have an accurate description of the items. Countertops made of granite and Corian also have resale value and may be added to the donated goods. Typically, the donor's contractor will carefully remove the cabinets and put them in the donor's garage for pick-up by the winning bidder.

Potential donors learn about the Re-Store in several ways. Some call Habitat directly; others, through their kitchen cabinet retailers who share with them the information that the perfectly good cabinets they wish to replace can be recycled by donating them to Habitat Newark and getting a tax write-off; and some, through their contractors.

Besides kitchen-related goods, Habitat Newark's Re-Store has sold items such as a gas fireplace insert, relatively new Andersen French doors, exterior doors, late-model double paned windows, outdoor play sets, and even a 20-year old sub-zero refrigerator and freezer. If you have something to donate that you think could be sold this way, please contact Jean Bell at 973 624-3330 or Julian at (973) 454-3487.

**Goods auctioned on eBay.** Once the item is offered on eBay Julian's extensive commentaries and willingness to respond to potential buyer's questions have earned him rave customer reviews. The bidding is started at a very low price as an incentive to get bids. Typically buyers are local (coming from within an 80-90 mile range) since the buyer must pick up the goods. That is not always the case. Buyers have come a significantly greater distance to pick up their new purchase or have plans to install it at remote locations. Some buyers have come from as far away as Florida, Michigan, Ohio, Canada and upstate New York.

**Astute budget buyers.** Julian describes his buyers as "terrific people", frequently family people with limited means on a budget and other times, astute buyers who recognize a great bargain.

**Team effort.** The Habitat office staff is not the only one who helps Julian operate the virtual Re-Store. When additional support is needed, Carpenter Club volunteers Steve Beck, Jim Waldron and Joe Schachtele all pitch in to help what is really a team effort to help raise funds for Habitat Newark. Julian points out that he is just doing what works for him to help Habitat and that volunteering for Habitat is not limited to home-building and can take many non-construction forms.

**A Win-Win for All.** When the goods are sold, Habitat Newark gets the proceeds; the donor homeowners get a tax deduction; budget-conscious buyers get quality goods at a very reasonable price; and, the

donated goods are recycled rather than sent to a dump. By running the Re-Store in a virtual environment, Habitat Newark avoids the expense of renting or purchasing a store and related overhead costs. Certainly Habitat Newark's virtual Re-Store is a win-win for all. To learn more about Habitat Newark's Re-Store, call Jean Bell at 973.624.3330