

Fresh Start Pallet Products

Hand-Crafted Garden Furnishings That Give Back

Looking for reasonably priced, interesting, sustainably built garden structures & furnishings? There's an organization in Hartford not only creating sturdy, well-priced, good looking pieces, but is doing so using perfectly good (and free!) wood from discarded shipping pallets while providing work and the chance of a better life for those constructing them.

Rev. Rick Kremer, pastor of Grace Lutheran Church in the Asylum Hill section of Hartford, tends to a large congregation, many of whom are battling addiction, homelessness and unemployment. Asylum Hill has Hartford's highest residential density, severe academic underachievement, and areas of deep poverty.

Pastor Rick was convinced that a holistic approach to employment was a critical need, but how would he accomplish that? Serendipitously, plans to make benches to provide seating in the neighborhood were being made, and a church member with tools and know-how was all ready to get started but had no wood. Well, right across the street were hundreds of discarded shipping pallets. Seizing the opportunity, they were given the pallets and began breaking them down to salvage the wood, much of it sturdy hardwoods such as ash, oak and maple.

From this simple beginning came a community initiative to create employment and training opportunities. The original workshop was in the back yard of the church until a huge space became available in the Veeder Place building on Sargeant Street. Low rent, perfect location and facilities gave the infant initiative a far better chance of success.

Building Furniture, Rebuilding Lives

Fresh Start Pallet Products (FSPP) secured 501(c)(3) non-profit status, and a growing product line for other times of year, so the cash flow is more even. Leadership is provided by a board of 16-20 individuals, who double as the sales force, and lend their design, manu-

facturing, and business skills to the organization, bringing hope to those who work there and a much clearer pathway to the holistic approach to employment that Pastor Rick envisioned.

Products

The board realized that with the right tools and designs the products made from recycled pallets could be very impressive. Only heat-treated wood is used, and many products are bench planed. Benches, chairs and arbors are the most popular items. There's a standard size, but custom sizes are available. Planter boxes, outdoor tables, picnic and side tables, as well as indoor furnishings are solidly made, and are sold as-is, stained, or painted. Louisa, the resident artist, does optional decorative and personalized painting, making for cheerful, unique additions to the garden or home.

The Staff

To date FSPP has employed 16 individuals. The current staff is 5. Market wages assure the workers feel valued, and all OSHA and safety regulations are upheld. Learning valuable skills, each worker is on a potentially life-changing journey. "Make no mistake, the real measure of success is lives changed, and the furniture sold will always be a means to the real goal," says the pastor.

Sales are primarily online, though there is a showroom you can visit by appointment. Additionally, FSPP has partnered with Kloter Farms and Cape Cod Fence, and each agreed to sell the products for no commission, returning 100% of the sale price back to FSPP.

They will deliver within a 35-mile radius for a small fee. Arbors are delivered in pieces, and furniture shipped whole. Scrap wood is turned into kindling and sold in \$5 bags.

Contact

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