

ARTICLE

Recycling Becomes a Tool to Promote Sustainable Living and Rehabilitation

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Introduction

In 2017, FWOP and Arise Veteran Foundation received the first shipments of leather to be recycled from Southwest Airlines as they were installing new leather in the seats of their planes. Arise Veterans Foundation took charge of the distribution to recycle tons of leather. This paper is an overview of our successes and what we learned over the years of operation. A former colleague at UNT, Dr. Todd Spinks, and former Director of Sustainability at UNT became the Advisor for Citizenship, Communications, and Outreach at SWA in 2017. He was responsible for introducing "sustainable within the SWA operations as well as for the total supply chain for Southwest Airlines."

Partnership with Recycling Center, Veteran Organizations, and Human Trafficking Recovery Programs.

Initially, we partnered with Jim Kravic (Combat Disabled Veteran) of RSK Recycling Solutions in East St. Louis. This center hired veterans who were unable to work full-time or part-time. Many of his employees suffered from Substance Abuse Disorders (SAD) and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and our project helped 12 veterans find employment. RSK has

warehouse space to receive semi-truck loads of discarded airline leather seats. They also had expertise on possible ways to recycle the leather. We established a second warehouse in North Nashville near the Knowles Home, an assisted living facility with some 100 residents. Arise then had the capacity to launch the third warehouse for leather in Miami, Oklahoma. Through Affiliation Agreements Arise partnered with Help Heal Veterans and Retreaded to establish major locations to recycle leather into meaningful products.



Help Heal Veterans in Winchester, California

Help Heal Veterans in Winchester, California, became a solid partner in the journey. Help Heal Veterans' mission was to enrich the lives of veterans and military personnel. Healing arts and crafts provide a therapeutic experience for all veterans, including those hospitalized, in shelters, in convalescent homes, and those undergoing therapy for a wide range of physical and mental challenges. This organization prepares rehabilitation kits for veterans and their families that utilize leather. With our partnership, we were able to send them leather seats from SWA in Dallas, and thus we lowered their costs for new leather.



Rethreaded

Rethreaded is a recovery program for women who have been victims of human trafficking in Jacksonville, Florida. Their focus is on developing entrepreneur and job skills development among these women. They create items for sale on their website (www.rethreaded.com/about-us/). Many items they make are made from leather that they sell. They do not need to buy leather, thanks to semi-truck loads of leather that go to Rethreaded. With their global outreach and local efforts in Florida, around 4000 women receive assistance. Some of the items they produce are now on the Arise store website.



At Arise, we aim to empower veterans and equip them to serve alongside us and work in their local communities. We are developing programs to house, train, incubate new businesses, and help create companies that recycle materials for creative projects. Arise Veteran Foundation Programs with Southwest is to create items from recycled airline seat leather that promote human development and rehabilitation among veterans, their families, and many other non-veterans in a wide range of communities, from Tribal communities to long-term care and rehabilitation communities.



By expanding our outreach efforts to more and more partners, we can also divert reusable materials that would end up in a landfill otherwise. Saint Louis, Missouri-Bulk recycling has recycled over 685,000 lbs. of leather and created 1,200 lbs. bales to be shipped for complete recycling to other locations. With our partnership with RSK recycling, we have been able to help employ twelve veterans. Many suffer from PTSD and/or SAD addiction issues.

Empowering Residents in Assisted Living Facilities

Knowles Home in North Nashville serves low-income residents residing in Davidson County. Boredom and depression plague many assisted living facilities nationally. In an attempt to engage or reengage residents at the Knowles Home, the administration instituted many activities to expand engagement with life. We store the SWA airline seats in a nearby warehouse, allowing for easy access to leather for our residents. To be useful for affiliated crafters, small pieces of leather are needed to be cut out from each seat. Some of the residents at Knowles Home have taken on the task and are being reimbursed for the effort.



One senior who had lost two legs and lost interest in life became energized by the task. Using a Cricut Machine, he began to take apart the seats. After ten years of depression, he has found a purpose in life and can go "to work" on his schedule. This Resident also earned a small hourly wage that enabled him to purchase computer games and equipment. Residents have helped put together boxes of cut-down SWA seats to be shipped to tribal communities and others interested in craft projects using the leather. One-hundred and thirty-five pounds of leather have been recycled at the Knowles Home Assisted Living Campus.



In 2021, World Health Organization (WHO) paid to ship one-thousand solar lamps from Nashville to Afghanistan. Before they were shipped, it was important to see that each lamp was functioning. A team of fifteen (15) residents got together to change up the solar lamps and ensure one-

thousand lamps were in working order. They were excited to assist people in Afghanistan.



Corporate partners join the team

Based upon our involvement in RSK Recycling in East St. Louis, a computer and electronic recycling company joined our network. This allowed us to distribute some inexpensive recycled laptop computers to students at Tribal Colleges. In addition, the company Circuit became a partner, and we were able to provide some circuit machines to various locations, especially where small enterprises were being set up. Some devices have been shipped to partners across the USA and now to Costa Rica, where the leather has been recently sent. Arise Veteran Foundation Affiliates are also provided a one-year Cricut Craft Membership.

Homeless

In Saint Louis Homeless, Arise Affiliative and Marine Jon Hiltz took bags made from SWA Leather and inserted hygiene and solar lamps to recharge their cell phones for homeless individuals in Saint Louis. This was in partnership with Shower to the People, which provides the option for the homeless in St. Louis to take a hot shower. Jon works with Veterans living on the streets of St. Louis, getting

them off the streets, into mental health treatment, and connecting them to community and church-based sobriety programs.

SWA Magazine Recycling

As we became involved with Southwest Airlines, we learned about other materials that could be recycled. We knew that SWA had thousands of used company magazines and posters to discard. Arise accepted the used magazines and received its first shipment in 2018. A nursing assistant from the Philippians taught the girl friends' group in St. Louis Origami skills to create some art from the magazines and posters. Some of the artworks were displayed in SWA stores.



Tribal Communities and Veterans

In Miami, Oklahoma, tribal members create leather bags from SWA leather and insert one solar lamp and hygiene supplies in each pack for Tribal Veterans. Plus, local 'beaders' are creating bookmarks with beadwork that matches the tribal membership colors of each veteran—some beadwork as being attached to bags out of the SWA leather. We are working with the following tribes to provide leather for crafts: Pawnee, Quapaw, Comanche, Ho-chunk, Santee Sioux, Ottawa, Eastern Band Cherokee, Mashantucket Pequot Nation, Penobscot, and Cherokee.



Retirement Community in Florida

The activity director used leather for therapy projects in Anthem Lakes senior community in Jacksonville, Florida. In addition, we met a WW2 Veteran, Seaman 1st Class Joy Casino that was living at Anthem Lakes. She was producing about 60 child dresses per month. We help her send dresses to some eight nations: Mexico, Honduras, Nicaragua, Vietnam, Uganda, Nigeria, Philippians, Pakistan, and North Korea.





In North Nashville, afterschool students in the program organized by Instructor Matthias Winfree from Fisk University and Kenneth Stewart of Tennessee's Aquatic Program (TAP), were taught how to make leather bags from SWA leather. These products are then sold to the community in order to support diving trips for inner-city youth.



Conclusion

While we did not clearly understand how recycling leather would promote rehabilitation, human development, and economic development when we began, we are amazed at the journey we have been on every day.

Because we have assisted SWA's goal of becoming an eco-friendlier company,

Arise Veteran Foundation Growth

The SWA leather project has opened doors to organizations across the world. The reputation of Arise and its affiliates like FWOP have grown. SWA wants to be known for its sustainability projects and efforts. This public awareness has enhanced both Arise, its Affiliated Organizations, and SWA's Community Engagement Program. Below are stories about our joint effort to upcycle materials responsibly in the Carbondale Veteran facility; they have learned to make a guitar from cigar boxes.



they have provided our network with many free airline tickets. While the tickets have helped our network expand our capacity more inexpensively, the most striking contribution has been our ability to save veterans considering suicide. One-hundred and Twenty-four vouchers were utilized to fly sixty-eight combat veterans to veterans at risk of self-harm. Sixty-eight

(68) veterans have been rescued from around the United States and enrolled in the PTSD Veteran Foundation residential program, Cape Hope, in Houston Texas.

One major challenge has been to locate partners who can use vast quantities of leather because of the tons of leather we receive periodically. Help Heal Vet was an ideal partner for Arise due to a large number of veterans served every year in rehab because of the quantity they can use.

Crafters are not able to use large amounts of leather. The Retread's Director Kristin Keen has learned that a design specialist is required to successfully create items that find a market. Our links to Tribal Communities the casinos may provide locations for tribal crafters to supplement their income and help utilize the large volume of leather.