

# HOMIE

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EXTRA INSIDE  
Community news

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## Clearing Out *for a Cause*

*Too Many Old Computers,  
Cribs, Bikes and Books?  
Plenty of Folks Could Use Them.*



**WITH THE HOLIDAYS** behind us, January becomes prime time to think about streamlining our overcrowded lives — and homes.

Consider that hulking desktop computer now shoved aside for a sleek laptop, the old coffeepot outclassed by an espresso system, and clothing you'll never diet back into. Don't overlook housewares, toys, bikes, furniture, books, DVDs, sheets and towels. Even kitchen cabinets, refrigerators and vintage radiators are prime candidates for clearing out if you're poised to renovate.

One usual approach to decluttering is to pack stuff off, unsorted, to large charity thrift stores for public resale, with the proceeds used to finance the organizations' good works. But another, more targeted solution is to find organizations that direct specific items to those who most need them. But remember, most groups require that donations be "gently used" or in "dignity condition."

Inside, we have rounded up a sampling of local groups looking to match donated goods with people in need. Some county and city gov-

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ernment Web sites — [www.montgomerycountymd.gov](http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov), for example — provide a similar service, with names of such local charities. Neighborhood e-mail discussion groups, schools, civic groups, churches, temples and mosques often know of families who need a bed, stove or clothing.

There are also online directories of nonprofits in need of donated items. The Web site run by Charitable Choices in Gaithersburg, [www.charitychoices.com](http://www.charitychoices.com), describes dozens of Maryland, Virginia and District tax-exempt groups that have been pre-screened by the federal government's Combined Federal Campaign. A section called "where to give away your stuff" explains what each group needs and what percentage of its operating budget goes to fundraising and advertising.

"Sometimes you can have more impact on a smaller organization because your money and your stuff means more," says Charitable Choices director Tim Saasta.

Annie Groer



# Reuser-Friendly: Sharing Your Spares

## Teaching Old Computers New Clicks

If you've gotten a new computer over the holidays, resist the urge to banish the older model to the basement or garage. Lots of local organizations would be happy to take it off your hands and either harvest usable parts and recycle the rest or pass the whole thing on to others who can use it, sometimes regardless of the age of the technology.

District-based **First Time Computers** is a nonprofit group that fixes donated computers and gives them to students from low-income families. The group also offers a training program in which young people learn to repair computers; upon completion, participants are given a computer to take home.

"It gives the computer a second life, and it's putting them to use where they are really needed," says First Time's founder, Lowell Dodge. "In the broader scheme of things, it helps level the digital divide."

Dodge says the organization will pick up at locations inside the Beltway. For more information, visit [www.firsttimecomputers.org](http://www.firsttimecomputers.org).

To find other area organizations that accept donations of used computers, visit [www.techsoup.org/mar](http://www.techsoup.org/mar). For local organizations and retailers that take old computers for recycling, visit [www.mcgreenelectronics.org](http://www.mcgreenelectronics.org).

Terri Sapienza

## Clothes Ready to Wear

Warm clothing is always needed this time of year by organizations serving the homeless.

"Our donations increase in December, but then they drop off," says Rachel Akins, director of resource development for the **Arlington Street People's Assistance Network** (A-SPAN). "Our shelters have been filled to capacity, and we really need clothing."

Akins says her organization, which provides emergency shelter, meals and employment counseling, is especially seeking coats, sweat shirts, hats, boots and long underwear for men and women (preferably large sizes). Items can be dropped off year-round at 2708-B S. Nelson St. in Arlington; 703-820-4357. The A-SPAN Emergency Shelter, at 2049 N. 15th St., accepts items daily from November through March; 703-528-3082. For more information, visit [www.a-span.org](http://www.a-span.org).

**Bread for the City**, which serves low-income Washington residents, accepts women's, children's and men's apparel for all seasons. Last year, the organization distributed 150,000 gently used articles of clothing. Men's and women's suits are always in demand for clients who have job interviews or need to attend funerals, according to Adrienne Ammerman, a development associate. Donations accepted at the Southeast Center, 1640 Good Hope Rd. SE, and at the Northwest Center, 1525 Seventh St. NW. For hours of operation, call 202-386-7606 or visit [www.breadforthecity.org](http://www.breadforthecity.org).

Jana Koncinski

## Old Towels to Comfort Puppies

If you're thinking of getting that jumbled linen closet organized this year, donating old sheets and towels may give you that extra motivation to do it now. Some local animal-rescue organizations and shelters welcome sheets, blankets, towels and even old fur coats and hats throughout the year.

In Gaithersburg, **Second Chance Wildlife Center** rehabilitates injured or orphaned wild animals such as squirrels, ducklings and foxes and educates the public about wild animals. Kathleen Handley, office manager and wildlife rehabilitator at Second Chance, says the group accepts clean flat sheets and unadorned towels, which can be used for animal bedding. Donated linens "keep them warm. It's comforting," Handley says. "We're sure to call before dropping off donations because a shelter's storage space may be limited, Handley says."

Linda Jasper, president of another rehabilitation organization, the **Wildlife Rescue League** in Falls Church, says her group cuts up donated fur coats and hats and uses them to keep baby animals warm during the winter. Donations chair Jen Connors says fur is "strictly used for mammal babies . . . [Furs provided] a familiar feeling, like a motherly kind of feel."

For more information about these groups, visit [www.scwc.org](http://www.scwc.org) or [www.wildliferescueligues.org](http://www.wildliferescueligues.org). To locate other organizations that accept linen donations, contact your local animal shelter, rescue league or even ask at a veterinarian's office, Jasper says. Be sure to call before dropping off donations because a shelter's storage space may be limited, Handley says.

Kathleen Horn

## A New Spin for Cribs and Bikes

The **National Center for Children and Families** started 83 years ago as an orphanage. Now this private nonprofit group operates nine social service programs to help impoverished, neglected, abused or at-risk children and their parents in Maryland and the District.

The center runs Montgomery County's only shelter for domestic violence victims and another shelter for families at its Bethesda headquarters. Baby equipment and toys are in high demand at both locations, says Heather Backman, the center's director of community and corporate relations. "No name it for children and newborns," Backman says, "we need it."

The center specifically requests "practical" toys, cribs, clothing, high chairs, portable playpens and other baby gear. Unlike many children's charities, the center will accept stuffed animals, as long as they have been through the washing machine and survived intact. No one-eyed teddy bears, please.

The center also operates residential programs for adolescents and it needs sports and exercise equipment, donations that "allow our children to have fun and get the kind of exercise they need to be healthy, happy children, that allow them to just be children," Backman says.

For information about donation drop-off at the organization's Greentree Road office, call 301-965-4480 or visit [www.nccf-care.org](http://www.nccf-care.org).



Other organizations are eager for the bicycles you no longer use. One, **Bikes for World**, a project of the Washington Area Bicyclist Association, shipped more than 8,000 bikes this year to nonprofit agencies in Africa, Latin America, the Caribbean and elsewhere. "It's a win-win situation for everyone," says director Keith Oberg. "It puts unappreciated resources to good use overseas. . . . A bike is a ticket for someone to get to work or school. It gives people control over their lives."

The organization is based at 3108 17th St. N. in Arlington. For information, call 703-525-0931 or visit [www.bikesfortheworld.org](http://www.bikesfortheworld.org). Also in Arlington, a shop called **Phoenix Bikes** teaches bicycle mechanics and business skills to middle and high school students, and runs an earn-a-bike program. For details, see [phoenixbikes.org](http://phoenixbikes.org).

Belle Eising and Liz Seymour

## Used Books' Next Chapter

Some people are so attached to books that they find it hard to give them away. But knowing that those books will be helping a good cause might ease the pain.

Montgomery County's **Friends of the Library** hopes to clear \$600,000 this fiscal year selling hardcover and paperback novels and non-fiction books as well as cookbooks, children's books and travel tomes, CDs, albums and books on tape. They do not accept encyclopedias, magazines or outdated nonfiction.

The money is used for grants to libraries, bookmobiles and detention centers, and special library programs for Black History Month and Cinco de Mayo, kids' summer reading and teen battles-of-the-books that are held at branch libraries, says the group's executive director, Art Brooks.

Donate (or shop) at the Wheaton Library at 11701 Georgia Ave., 240-777-0688; and the Randolph Hills shopping center, 4886 Bolling

Brook Ploey, Rockville, 301-984-3300, [www.film.com](http://www.film.com). Steve Hersey founded **Books for America** in 2002. He figures the group gave away about 60,000 books last year to homeless and women's shelters, soup kitchens, hospices, AIDS clinics, adult literacy programs, veterans hospitals, jails and disadvantaged public schools and libraries in the District, Maryland and Virginia. "I can't get enough children's books and would love to have more that are bilingual, in Spanish or with African American themes," he says.

The group also runs a store in Dupont Circle that sells books, CDs and DVDs, signed or rare books and collectibles are auctioned online. (No magazines, no hardback fiction unless rare or signed, no textbooks published before 2006, no yellowed or damaged books.) Pickup is sometimes available for large donations. **Books for America Bookstore**, 1417 22nd St. NW, 202-835-2665, [www.booksforamerica.org](http://www.booksforamerica.org).

Annie Groer

## Hit Replay for Music and Movies

Those forgotten stacks of DVDs and CDs spilling from your shelves (and onto the floor?) can be fresh entertainment for a wider audience. **Walter Reed Army Medical Center**, for example, welcomes donations of music and movies to help wounded soldiers pass the time during recovery. Twenty-something makes up the majority of the population there, says Steve Maguire, director of the Soldier Family Assistance Center. "Pop, rock, R&B and country are among the most popular genres."

Among DVDs, he says, Arnold Schwarzenegger action flicks are always in high demand. Donations can be mailed to Walter Reed Army Medical Center Soldier Family Assistance Center, Attention: Donations, Room 2Z91, 6900 Georgia Ave. NW, Washington, D.C. 20307. To donate in person, call 202-782-7811 or 202-356-1012, Ext. 40706. VHS and cassette tapes are of little use

because soldiers view movies and listen to music on portable devices that will not accommodate tapes. But these items can be donated to organizations such as **Goodwill of Greater Washington**.

Goodwill sells donated items at its stores and online. Profits provide job training and employment services for the disadvantaged and disabled. Brendan Hurley, Goodwill's senior vice president, says books on tape and vinyl records are hot sellers. For hours of the nine donation sites throughout the region, go to [www.donategoodwill.org](http://www.donategoodwill.org) or call 202-636-4225.

Jana Koncinski

## Housewares Help Make a Home

The extra bed, bureau or microwave that no longer has a place in your home could work wonders in someone else's. **A Wider Circle**, a Bethesda-based nonprofit organization founded in 2001, directs basic items for the home to families living in poverty and sets up educational programs in shelters, community centers, low-income schools and housing complexes.

"Poverty is the cause of most of the social ills we have," says the group's founder, Mark Bergel. "If people don't have a bed to sleep in and a place to put their clothes, it's going to be a lot harder to make other lifestyle changes." The group's Neighbor to Neighbor program collects furniture and housewares, including pots and pans, dish sets, small kitchen appliances, linens and towels in good condition (not ripped or stained) and distributes them to those in need. Mattresses, box springs and bed frames, dressers and kitchen tables and chairs are in greatest demand. Four hundred families are on the waiting list for assistance, Bergel says. Call to schedule a pickup or a drop-off at the group's storage site, Bergel says

volunteers to help collect and distribute items and to coordinate neighborhood drives are most welcome, too. For more information, call 301-657-1010 or visit [www.awidercircle.org](http://www.awidercircle.org).

Terri Sapienza



## They Rake In Spare Tools

If you are faced with clearing out an old garden shed or workshop, several organizations stand ready to accept donated hand tools and power tools.

**Our House Youth Home** is a charity based on a 140-acre farm near Olney where at-risk youths live and learn construction skills and organic farming while completing their high school education. The organization accepts all kinds of tools and equipment used in agriculture and the building trades, says Richard Bienenwae, the group's founder. "Some people drop them off, and if they can't we'll pick them up," he says.

The farm is at 19715 Zion Rd., Brookville. For more information, call 301-519-1019 or visit [www.our-house.org](http://www.our-house.org).

At the National Arboretum, the **Friends of the National Arboretum** accepts garden tools that can be used in its Washington Youth Garden, a large vegetable plot tended by inner-city schoolchildren. Contact Kaifa Anderson-Hall at 202-544-8733 or [Kaifa.Anderson-Hall@nars.usda.gov](mailto:Kaifa.Anderson-Hall@nars.usda.gov).

In Northern Virginia, **Green Spring Gardens** accepts garden tools and equipment, as well as books and containers, though not the black plastic pots from garden center pots, says spokeswoman Cindy Brown. Surplus donations are sold to fund the park's friends group, she says. The park is at 4603 Green Spring Rd., Alexandria. For more information, call 703-642-5173 or visit [www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/gspg](http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/gspg).

Local chapters of **Habitat for Humanity** also accept tools and equipment, though they are sold to raise funds in the organization's ReStore building-supply retail stores in greater Washington. The Northern Virginia ReStore is at 1770 Richmond Hwy., Alexandria. The charity's Arlington office can be reached at 703-521-9890. The suburban Maryland store is at 9100 Gather Rd., Gaithersburg, call 301-990-0014.

Adrian Higgins