

Ruralite

GOLDEN VALLEY ELECTRIC

OCTOBER 2020

Green Star: The Recycling People



Green Star's former executive director, Tait Chandler, left, and Fairbanks Resource Agency Director of Community Development Wendy Cloyd with donated refurbished laptops that will be used by FRA members.
PHOTO COURTESY OF GREEN STAR

Green Star: The Recycling People

By Kris Capps

Every high school and middle school student in foster care in the Fairbanks North Star School District has their own laptop, thanks to a recycling program by Green Star of Interior Alaska.

The program is changing lives.

"The achievement gap between youth in care and the general population is staggering," says Linda Fraini, foster care liaison with the Fairbanks North Star School District.

With laptops in hand, students can keep in touch with teachers, collaborate on assignments with their peers outside of school, conduct independent research, complete homework assignments and write from the comfort of their foster homes.

"When you think about it, it's pretty amazing," Linda says.

This important program is one of several operated by Green Star of Interior Alaska.

Green Star formed in the mid-1990s as a committee with the Fairbanks Chamber of Commerce. In 1998, it became its own nonprofit agency and began to take a closer look at the needs of the community. Today, Green Star is committed to reducing waste and increasing recycling opportunities in Interior Alaska.

The Fairbanks North Star



A Green Star team with cans for recycling after an event.

Borough operates the Central Recycling Facility on Marika Drive. Think of Green Star as the educational arm of recycling in the Interior.

"We want to be known as the recycling people," says board member Andrea Miller.

Green Star has its own warehouse where recycled electronics are sent for processing, whether for refurbishment and resale or sometimes charitable donation.

"It has really developed over the years," Andrea says. "We try and resell things that will provide funds to help support our nonprofit and the program.

"We try and break things down in ways that make the most sense. We want to make sure everything gets recycled or reused safely and properly."

Green Star works with ComputerWerks Inc. to refurbish computers that are still viable and sell them at a deeply discounted rate to

people who need them.

"People get low-cost computers and we get more life out of the electronics," Andrea says.

When the opportunity arose to provide laptops for students in foster care, Green Star did not hesitate.

"That was really special to know we were making an impact," Andrea says.

Green Star is also the Interior Regional coordinator for the village Backhaul Program, which brings in electronics from remote communities. The agency partners with a company called Backhaul Alaska. Since 2011, Green Star has worked with 16 Interior villages, bringing out more than 56,000 pounds of electronics.

"That's been a really great partnership," Andrea says.

Green Star also offers educational curriculum for grades 6 through 8, and provides the Fairbanks Recycling Guide to regularly

remind residents what can be recycled and where to recycle.

"Recycling has never been really that easy in Fairbanks or Alaska in general," Andrea says. "We try and make it a little easier and make sure people have the information."

Green Star is probably most visible at events, such as the Tanana Valley Fair or the Midnight Sun Festival, where the group sponsors recycling efforts.

"A lot of what we do is digging through piles of old electronics, digging cans out of garbage at the fair," Andrea says.

All of those programs makes small improvements in the community every day.

"We're just happy people are interested and excited about recycling," Andrea says.

These programs sometimes change lives. The program providing computers for foster students has expanded to include other youth in need and organizations focusing on adults, such as the Fairbanks Resource Agency and The Bridge in Fairbanks.

Overall, Green Star has donated an estimated 100 computers to foster kids to date.

"I just can't even speak highly enough of what Green Star did for our foster care youth," Linda says. "The kids themselves were really amazed." ■

For more information, see www.iagreenstar.org.