

Education center has found a good home at local charity

BY MARA STINE

The Gresham Outlook, Aug 15, 2007

There is at least one silver lining to the closure of Gresham's first computer recycling center: Its 16-station education center has been donated "lock, stock and barrel" to a local charity, said recycling center co-director Paul Warr-King.

Birch Community Services, located off Northeast San Rafael and 181st Avenue, happily benefited from the refurbished/recycled computers, software and furniture, said founder Barry Birch.

"This dropped right out of the sky for us," said Birch, who founded the not-for-profit corporation to help the working poor with everything from food to budgeting their meager finances.

Birch said the charity had applied for grants to pay for 12 laptops in the hopes of creating an on-site computer-training center. "We try to offer our families as many educational tools as we can," Birch said. The charity already teaches a few computer classes, some of which it held at the Gresham Recycling and Education Center.

Then John McIssac, the center's head volunteer, told Birch the recycling center was closing and asked him if his organization could use 16 computer stations that made up the center's educational program.

"It had to go somewhere," Birch said, adding that the answer was an enthusiastic yes.

Ken Manske, co-director of the Gresham Recycling and Education Center, estimated the donation includes \$45,000 to \$60,000 worth of computers, software and other electronics.

Now Birch Community Services hopes to expand its computer classes into even more educational opportunities.

"It's all virgin territory for us," Birch said. "We're just in the beginning stages of trying to figure out what all this means. ... We want to be good stewards of such a gracious gift.

"It's just so nice to have the equipment," Birch said, adding that he dreams of opening up the new computer center to the community.