

STRAWS AND FORKS!

BY: SHELLY CODNER, IOWA WASTE EXCHANGE, AREA 4

Surplus from businesses comes in many forms. Whether it is excess goods or items sitting in storage, the Iowa Waste Exchange is here to help! An importer/wholesaler company in Dubuque identified items too good to landfill, and stored them in search of the perfect opportunity for others to use. That opportunity came in the form of Area 3 resource specialist, Tammy Turner who has placed many of the stored items with organizations, non-profits, individuals and businesses throughout her service area and beyond.

As the Deputy Director for Metro Waste Authority (MWA), Leslie Irlbeck drives strategic initiatives outlined as key priorities by Metro's Board of Directors. Two of those priorities include environmental stewardship and responsible waste management. Which is why, when faced with an opportunity to exercise both, Leslie reached out to Iowa Waste Exchange (IWE) Area Resource Specialist, Shelene Codner.

MWA had been contacted by a generator, who - due to unavoidable circumstances - had 1,600,000 compostable straws and 256,000 compostable forks. The straws and forks were new, in their original boxes and delivered on pallets to MWA's Materials Recovery Facility in Grimes, Iowa. In accordance with the waste management hierarchy - reduce, reuse, recycle - Irlbeck knew these materials would prove valuable to many. Irlbeck - with the generator's blessing - contacted Codner in September 2023.

Codner with the assistance of Michael McCoy, MWA Executive Director and Dan Haag, MWA Recycling Administrator performed an onsite inventory. Immediately following this onsite, Codner reached out to her networks. She then scheduled - and with the assistance of MWA staff - manned an onsite pick-up day on September 19, 2023 for those interested in obtaining the materials. With the assistance of one of her client recycling companies, pallets that remained following the pick-up event were moved to warehouse space donated to IWE in Des Moines where distribution for those that could not attend the pickup event continued throughout September, October and November. While the bulk of the materials have been spoken for, warehousing and distribution will continue throughout spring 2024 on behalf of committed non-profits who have huge hearts but not huge storage areas.

Thus far, 20,000 pounds of forks and straws have been matched to over 30 organizations, including businesses, schools, universities, non-profits, cities, fire stations, emergency management organizations, missions, 4-H



clubs, churches, conservation groups, libraries and special fund-raising events. This exchange has saved the receiving organizations nearly \$55,000 in avoided purchases.

For more information about Metro Waste Authority visit www.mwatoday.com. For additional information about the Iowa Waste Exchange visit www.iowadnr.gov/faba or contact Shelene Codner, scodner@region12cog.org, (319) 404-1942.