



HOME | ISSUES | VIDEOS | GUIDELINES | ABOUT US | USING GSDFW | GREEN LINKS

Nonprofit DME Exchange recycles durable medical equipment

NEW Green Organization

By Julie Thibodeaux

DME Exchange Open House: Oct. 20, 9 a.m. to 2 p.m., 12015 Shiloh Road, Suite 130, Dallas

An organization based in Dallas that is helping distribute durable medical equipment considers its mission to be “green.” That’s because while helping Dallas County residents obtain the medical equipment they need, it aims to keep hundreds of used wheelchairs, walkers and other apparatus out of the landfill and in use. According to a 2009 U.S. Environmental Protection Agency study, durable goods -- bulky items with a minimum 3-year life span -- make up almost 20 percent of municipal landfill waste.



DME Exchange of Dallas, which is opening its new facility in Northeast Dallas this week, provides a place where residents can donate medical equipment now cluttering their closets. The nonprofit was started in 2010 after Dallas Area Interfaith, a coalition of civic and religious institutions, surveyed Dallas underprivileged residents and discovered many weren’t able to get the proper medical equipment they needed because they were uninsured, underinsured and living below the poverty level.

Area hospitals and the medical community confirmed that recovery was often delayed for its underprivileged clients as staff scrambled to find donated equipment. Meanwhile, members of DAI had a hunch that many Dallas residents had wheelchairs and walkers gathering dust in their garages. So they set out to create a clearinghouse for these used items.

Jim Waldorf, executive director of DME Exchange, said he initially became involved with the organization last August as a donor. His father, a paraplegic, had become disabled after contracting polio at age 30. As a pharmacist who owned his own business, his father was able to afford the medical equipment he needed. To keep up with his active lifestyle, he had six mobility devices, each designed for special uses, and a van. When he died last year, Waldorf wanted to find an outlet that could help him give the items to people who needed them. He learned that DME Exchange of Dallas was gearing up to launch. Because of his personal passion for the cause, Waldorf, a financial adviser by trade, joined the board and soon was appointed executive director.

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- Energy
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- Entrepreneur
- Environment
- Events
- Family
- Film Reviews
- Food and Restaurants
- Gardens and Gardening
- Government
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- Music
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- Organic
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- Recreation
- Recycle
- Recycling
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- Services
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- Solar
- Sustainable
- Transportation

Events

« October »						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31			

- National Alternative Fuel Vehicle Day - Arlington**
Thu, 10/18/2012 (Ongoing)
- Grapevine Farmers Market**
Thu, 10/18/2012 - 8:00am
- Tarrant County Greenweavers: Energy Efficiency - Keller**
Thu, 10/18/2012 - 12:30pm
- Downtown Arlington Farmers Market**
Fri, 10/19/2012 - 8:00am
- Big Bang - Dallas**
Fri, 10/19/2012 - 9:00am
- Boo at the Zoo - Fort Worth**
Fri, 10/19/2012 - 12:00pm
- Halloween at the Heard Museum - McKinney**
Sat, 10/20/2012 (Ongoing)
- Coppell Farmers Market + Food Day - Coppell**
Sat, 10/20/2012 - 8:00am
- Frisco Farmers Market**
Sat, 10/20/2012 - 8:00am
- Keller Farmers Market**
Sat, 10/20/2012 - 8:00am

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“I had business experience and I wanted to accelerate the process of getting the organization up and running,” said Waldorf. Although Waldorf was anxious for the nonprofit to launch, he learned it wasn’t just a matter of finding needy people and handing out wheelchairs and canes, as a number of well-meaning churches and service groups do.



To responsibly distribute the items and protect the organization legally, they must ensure all equipment is sanitized properly, checked over by a trained technician and prescribed by a doctor so that users are matched with the appropriate devices. For two years, DME Exchange has been in the building process -- applying for grants, gathering inventory, training staff and renovating the facility. They hope to have their operating license approved by Thanksgiving so they can begin distributing equipment in time for the

holidays.

After hosting an open house at their new 2,500-square-foot facility on Oct. 20, they will operate Tuesdays and Thursdays, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. They hope to increase those hours as they acquire more funding. In the meantime, they will be relying heavily on volunteers to answer phones, refurbish equipment and pick up and deliver items.

Since August, the group has already collected more than 50 power chairs and scooters, a dozen manual wheelchairs, a dozen walkers and two hospital beds. “That’s just without really trying, just by word of mouth,” said Waldorf. The group has also acquired the equipment and inventory of the American Mobility Foundation, a nonprofit that distributes donated vans designed for use by mobility impaired users, and will continue its work.

Those who wish to donate equipment are invited to contact the organization. DME Exchange accepts walkers, rollators, crutches, canes, bathroom and bedside equipment, along with powerchairs, medical scooters and hospital beds. Waldorf noted that power chairs have been easy to collect but they’re often the least prescribed. Doctors often prefer their patients use manual wheelchairs, crutches and walkers in order to keep them more active. “They want to keep the person as mobile as possible for as long as possible,” said Waldorf “Once in they’re in that equipment, they never get back out of it.”

Those who wish to obtain equipment should contact the organization. They must demonstrate need and have a doctor’s prescription. As organizers prepare to open the doors to their first clients, Waldorf said after months of preparation, he’s thrilled to see the dream become a reality.

“If there’s any kind of legacy I got from my dad, it’s -- ‘This is going to work.’”

For more information, see www.dfdmeexchange.org. DME Exchange Open House: Oct. 20, 9 a.m. to 2 p.m., 12015 Shiloh Road, Suite 130, Dallas :

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