Deconstruction and ReUse Network helps salvage remodel materials

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2015-01-14 19:53:02

Remodeling? Maybe that wood flooring or old door could find another home.

The Deconstruction and ReUse Network is a Newport Beach-based nonprofit that helps businesses and homeowners in the middle of a remodel to salvage materials that could be used again.

In a room with flooring from a remodeled Google facility in Santa Clara and a conference table straight out of a Clorox remodel project in Pleasanton, founder Lorenz Schilling said most business owners or homeowners are surprised by just how much can be reused.

Doors, lumber, flooring and lighting fixtures can all be saved from entering a landfill. Most homes, Schilling said, can have about 85 percent of their building material reused for another purpose.

He added that reuse of those building materials is another way of diverting building materials from the landfill during a remodeling project – something mandated by the state and many municipalities.

Deconstruction of homes is well-established in the Bay Area and fairly well-known in areas like West Los Angeles, Schilling said. It’s also slowly picking up in Orange County, especially in coastal communities or places like Anaheim Hills, he said.

“There’s a growing awareness of the (deconstruction) process,” Schilling said. “Younger developers are looking for more progressive solutions or looking for competitive advantages.”

The Deconstruction and ReUse Network has averaged 35 to 60 deconstruction projects per year since they started in 2007, Schilling said. The vast majority are residential projects, though commercial businesses have begun reaching out over the past three years.

“That’s a trend we definitely hope continues. That’s where there’s a great deal of waste,” Schilling said.

The DRN is, in an ideal world, involved in a project from the very beginning.

A homeowner, for example, should contact Schilling or one of his employees about two months before they want to start remodeling.

Those reusable materials end up at Habitat for Humanity ReStores. Lumber can be sold off or donated to organizations like Corazon in Santa Ana, which builds homes in Baja California.

The nonprofit would take an inventory of the materials, come up with the scope of the project in the home and ask affiliated contractors to bid on the salvage project and all other demolition needed. They’d also send a preliminary inventory of what they think can be salvaged to an appraiser that could give the homeowner an idea of how much of a charitable deduction they could take at tax time, Schilling said.

If the homeowner decides to go forward, the DRN would handle all paperwork, get information to the appraiser to get a final tax deduction total and transport all materials off-site.
The amount, type and volume of salvaged materials can vary widely with each deconstruction project, meaning the DRN has a constantly changing inventory of reusable building materials.

“This industry is very much the tail wagging the dog,” Schilling said. “You can’t just act like a normal retailer would ... control the flow of what’s inbound based on what’s coming out. It just comes.”

Larger projects over the past three years, like the Clorox remodel, provided 45 tractor trailers of materials that went to about a dozen organizations like the Oakland Zoo, the San Francisco Unified School District and Food for the Poor, which works in the Caribbean.

“We had to get pretty creative with those large-scale projects,” Schilling said.

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