

The Life of a Sewing Machine Donated to CSR

(Spoiler: It may end up halfway around the world!)

by Anne M. Pokoski

CSR Volunteer

City Sewing Room thrives because of donations to our Makers' Mart. The 2700 pounds on average of fabric, notions, tools, craft materials, and sewing machines that are donated every week are sorted, packaged, and sold to the public at extremely affordable low prices, mostly for \$2 a pound. Makers' Mart sales support our non-profit mission of "Stitch, Teach, Share" by paying for staff salaries, utilities, general operations, and equipment.

When a generous member of the area's sewing community donates a sewing machine or serger to the CSR, it will end up somewhere worthwhile, possibly far away, but certainly not in a landfill.

First, all our donated machines are cleaned and tested. If they are in good working order, they are bargain-priced and offered for sale in the Premium section of the Makers' Mart.

Many beginning sewists purchase one of these older machines because they have sought the recommendation of an experienced sewist or instructor at the CSR. Generally, older metal machines are more durable and efficient than their modern, computer-driven, plastic counterparts.

After initial inspection, if the donated machine needs slight repairs or replacement of basic parts, a CSR machine repair specialist will get it into good working order, then price it for sale.

If a machine cannot be repaired by CSR or would require too much of an investment to get it into good working order, it goes into holding in the CSR Annex.

This is where things become more interesting.

The machines "in holding" are picked up monthly at CSR by Paul Lindquist of Columbia, Missouri. Paul is a retired geologist whose personal history includes becoming a factory-trained Bernina repair specialist when he and his wife lived in Oregon. They had purchased a fabric store there, and to remain a Bernina dealer someone in the business had to undergo factory training. He also worked extensively on Kenmore machines for another shop in town.

When the couple eventually relocated to Missouri, Paul began volunteering for Mobility Worldwide, a non-profit organization based in Columbia that makes wood and metal three-wheeled, hand-cranked mobility carts for polio survivors and landmine accident victims, which are given freely as humanitarian aid.



Mobility Worldwide had recently begun a sewing machine project, whereby it was providing donated, refurbished machines to some of the same places where it donated its mobility carts. A small group of volunteer mechanics was working on the machines, but at that time no one had Paul's specific training with sewing machines. So he began working on both carts and sewing machines right away.

One of Mobility Worldwide's largest partners is Partners for Care, an Atlanta-based non-profit that has offices and staff in Kenya, where they distribute mobility carts, operate sewing schools, and provide other important services.

When Paul and his volunteer colleagues have enough repaired sewing machines to fill an entire shipping crate, they pack some of the space between the machines with bags of fabric and notions from the CSR, and it is driven to a Texas or New York port, where Partners for Care organizes its sea voyage. Originally the machines went to the organization's first sewing school in Kenya. Today, 10 years after the school's founding, Partners for Care supports more than 40 sewing schools in Africa.

Learning to sew empowers women to rise out of poverty and become self-sufficient by providing them with a means to earn an income, support their families, and educate their children. Many of the more than 4,000 sewing school graduates from PFC schools have found employment or started their own businesses creating garments, bags, and household linens.



In addition, Mobility Worldwide provides refurbished machines to several other charities and ministries -- at last count placing machines in 117 different countries throughout Africa and Central America.

If Paul and his friends at Mobility are unable to repair a machine, it is shipped for parts for use in relatively new African sewing machine repair shops. Broken down treadle machines are also sold for parts to Amish people, who find a use for them. Nothing goes to waste.

The machine you donate to CSR may end up in a South City apartment, or in a small village in Ecuador. Either way, it will be valued and we thank you for your donation.

Thank you, Paul, for your work with CSR and for helping us fulfil our mission to "Stitch, Teach, Share." We appreciate Mobility Worldwide's efforts to repair these donated machines and to get them where they are needed. To learn more about Mobility Worldwide, visit mobilityworldwide.org. Monetary donations are always welcome to help defray their international shipping costs.



Paul Lindquist and CSR Volunteer Anne M. Pokoski