

Rediscovering Happy Valley: Trash to Treasure

June 05, 2014 8:56 AM

by John Patishnock

UNIVERSITY PARK — As a writer, and as someone who consumes an unusually high number of books and movies, I've always enjoyed finding answers to questions in unlikely places and in unexpected ways.



[Click For Gallery](#)

For instance, how does Trash to Treasure, the annual Penn State move-out sale that combines student philanthropy and community volunteers, continue to be so successful?

You could formulate a lot of hypotheses, spend plenty of time talking to people and calculate plenty of possibilities.

But for me, the answer crystallized Saturday in the unlikeliest of ways. As I walked toward Gate C on Saturday afternoon in the aftermath of the sale's end, I passed David Manos and Conal Carr, two guys who have had a tremendous impact on the growth of Trash to Treasure, though their names don't often appear in newspaper stories or on the local news.

Manos was on the original planning committee and Carr joined the next year; they both work in the housing department at Penn State. Manos co-chairs the group, with both he and Carr making a huge imprint as sale day approaches. From working with volunteers and ensuring everything is organized, there's not much that happens without their oversight.

Fellow committee member Paul Ruskin has been receiving a fair amount of media coverage lately with his retirement, though like Manos and Carr, I've always felt all three of them are uncovered gems who contribute mightily not just to Trash to Treasure, but to the betterment of Penn State. Working with them has truly made me a better person.

I also walked around the stadium with co-chair Al Matyasovsky, and spoke with Janda Hankinson, a volunteer coordinator who's an all-star volunteer herself.

There was also Tammy Gentzel, executive director of Centre County United Way (CCUW).

After putting in an enormous amount of time, effort and planning, this would be the most appropriate time to relax and celebrate: right after the sale ended, after all their hard work resulted in nearly \$60,000 raised for Centre County United Way.

It'd also be understandable for them to be tired, to look around and wonder if they could leave without anyone noticing. But that's not what happened.

After all the media had left, after the sale had ended and after all the work seemed to be finished, everyone mentioned above (and many other volunteers and committee members) continued cleaning up and making the

space as pristine as possible.

I've always described the Trash to Treasure planning committee members as people who never stand around looking at their watch, waiting for the time when they can leave. For them, the time to leave is when their work is done, however long it takes. Sure, the newspaper reporters and television camera crews show up on sale day and a few days prior, but the majority of the work they put in gets done with nobody nearby with a camera or notepad.

To me, that's what makes this whole thing work, what makes Trash to Treasure a national model: The committee members do what's needed, when it's needed, with little thought given to how it's going to impact their own personal needs or desires.

That's why I volunteer every year and serve on the planning committee, because they inspire me.

On Saturday, I helped collect the \$5 early-bird admission fee before the sale from people in line, teaming with my good friend Lloyd Rhoades. Then, I helped welcome everyone into the sale at Gate B. For me, being at the gate when everyone first enters is always a highlight, seeing people of all ages and backgrounds experiencing Beaver Stadium in a new way. Everyone was in a good mood, with the overwhelming majority of people I interacted with on Saturday indicating they realized the importance of Trash to Treasure to the community.

After the initial rush, I spent about a half-hour speaking with U.S. Representative Glenn "GT" Thompson, who spoke for a few minutes before the sale. Right afterward, I introduced myself and thanked him for being there, and I didn't wait because I assumed he probably would leave shortly after speaking. I was wrong. Thompson spent the next few hours at the sale, speaking with myself and a few other members of the planning committee.

It was a very enjoyable conversation, with plenty of jokes and friendly chatter taking place, though the main takeaway for me was that Thompson, a U.S. representative who seemingly always has somewhere he needs to be, chose to set aside his morning and early afternoon to be at Beaver Stadium for the sale.

Since its inception in 2002, Trash to Treasure has raised more than \$650,000 for Centre County United Way and diverted nearly 900 tons of waste from the landfill. I have a personal interest in this because I believe in sustainability and Penn State's ability to be a national leader in this field, and other schools routinely seek out Trash to Treasure committee members to find out how to implement a similar sale on their respective campuses.

I've probably attended more than 100 home Penn State football games, but when I think about Beaver Stadium, I'm just as likely to envision the inner concourse where all the tons of donations are sorted and organized every year, where tireless volunteers give their time and effort.

In a few months, the typical large crowd will pack into Beaver Stadium for the home opener, and all anyone will be thinking about is how can James Franklin and Christian Hackenberg lead Penn State to its next Big Ten title.

I'll probably be thinking about that, too, but unlike the other spectators, I'll also look around and see Beaver Stadium in a way most others don't.

Disclaimer: Copyright © 2014 StateCollege.com. All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten or redistributed.

<http://www.statecollege.com/news/community/rediscovering-happy-valley-trash-to-treasure,1459443/>