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Hunks haulin' junk helps students, charities

By Elizabeth Jackman

“Every time someone drives by and sees the name on our truck, you can see a smile on their face,” said Tom Sharp, who opened College Hunks Hauling Junk last month.

The business is a win-win, for everyone, customers get junk hauled away at a reasonable rate, and the hunks earn money to help pay for school.

“I was on a Southwest Airlines flight to Las Vegas and was reading the in-flight magazine and read an article about College Hunks Hauling Junk,” said Sharp, who is currently running the business out of his Arrowhead Ranch home. “I own two other businesses, Line-X and Arizona Specialty Coatings, and they have both been affected by the economy, so I was looking around and this was intriguing. I started doing research and the more I learned, the more I liked it. I liked giving jobs to college kids.”

So the story goes, university student Omar Soliman and his buddies from high school set out to earn extra money for summer vacation by starting College Hunks Hauling Junk.

Soliman's mother owned a furniture store and she loaned him the store's beat-up cargo van. During his senior year of college, he entered his business plan into the Rothschild Entrepreneurship Competition, and out of 150 entries, won first place and \$10,000.

After graduation, Soliman met up with his old high school classmate, Nick Friedman, who had hauled junk with him during that initial summer.

Both left their corporate jobs, invested every penny they had and began hiring area college and university students. They coined themselves as “America's Junk Removal Specialists. Let Tomorrow's Leaders Haul Your Junk Today.”

That was in June 2005. Two years ago, the company began selling franchises.



Hunks Chris Marsh, right, and Bubba Burgoz, left, load an old sofa onto the truck which will be donated to charity.

“We are the 18th franchise in the country,” said Sharp, who already has three hunks hired.

First to be hired was Chris Marsh, 21, a graduate of Peoria High School currently attending Glendale Community College, who wants to transfer to Brigham Young and eventually become an oral surgeon.

Second to be hired was Glendale resident Anthony Glass, and third was Bubba Burgoz, 17, a recent graduate of Bourgade Catholic High School, who plans on attending ASU majoring in business management.

Marsh said he was hired after answering an ad on Craig's List and Burgoz grew up with Sharp's daughter since kindergarten.

“I love it, it is so much fun, I get to meet great people every day, it keeps me entertained,” Marsh said. “I like being outside and not sitting in a cubicle. You drive around in the truck and chicks stare at you. It is really a fun job.”

Sharp's wife Laura, said once business starts to pick up, they have three more hunks lined up and ready to start.

In addition to giving jobs to students, Sharp said there are other positive features of the business.

“More than 60 percent of the items we collect are recycled, so it doesn't end up in the landfill,” Sharp said. “I work with local recyclers for various items. I have one for copper and another takes old electronic components, computers and televisions.”

Anything that is still usable, sofas, furniture, kitchen wares is donated to local thrift shops such as Goodwill, St. Vincent de Paul and others.

Sharp said they will travel anywhere in the Valley to pick up junk people may have lying around their garage, back yard, attics, storage facilities or basements.

He said every day is something different.

“Today, we are going out to 7th Street and Cave Creek area to take down a gazebo,” Sharp said.

They have several high-profile locations next to busy roads, where they park their bright green and orange truck (colored for the Florida Gators where the company is based) and get about 20 percent of their business from people driving by who see it and call.

“In return for the businesses allowing us to park there, we haul away their garbage and keep their property looking nice,” Sharp said.

They also believe in community service, working with a local organization, Goldwater Blockwatch, that monitors neighborhoods and volunteer to clean out areas where people have dumped junk in alleys or in Skunk Creek.

In addition, they work with St. Louis the King Elementary School, where both Laura and Tom attended as kids, hauling away junk and helping them recycle obsolete computer equipment.

“It feels good to be able to give back,” Sharp said.

To learn more about College Hunks Hauling Junk, visit their Web site at www.1800junkusa.com, or call 800-JUNK-USA.

Reach the reporter at ejackman@star-times.com, or 623-847-4615.

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