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Friday, February 2, 2018



27.0°, Mostly Cloudy

and Breezy
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East Rockaway business owner's mattress recycling program aims to help environment

Posted February 1, 2018



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Christine Kiourtsis, right, examined the parts of a twin-sized mattress while East Rockaway native Colin Murphy cut it open.

MELISSA KOENIG/HERALD

By Melissa Koenig (mailto:mkoenig@liherald.com)

Christine Kiourtsis is passionate about mattresses.

That drive began in 2014, when she and her husband, Michael Hawksby, were sponsoring a fitness event at a Nassau County park. Kiourtsis and Hawksby, owners of ROK Health & Fitness in East Rockaway, saw a pile of mattresses on the ground while children were running past.

“He started saying, ‘I wonder if there’s a law about this?’” Kiourtsis, 45, of Valley Stream, recalled of her husband. “[He said,] ‘I always see mattresses laid around and just thrown around, and I wonder what’s going on here? Do they get recycled?’ So pretty much, that was the light bulb that started it all.”

Kiourtsis, who also works as the director of fitness programs and administration at ROK, then researched the issue and determined that there is no law in New York to prohibit people from dumping their mattresses on public land. She said she discovered that municipalities in the state often pick up mattresses with other trash, and bring them to a landfill, where they can take up to 100 years to decompose. Toxic chemicals from the mattresses could also seep into the ground, and contaminate New York’s drinking water, she added.

Several months later, Kiourtsis formed Renewable Recycling, Inc. to recycle the various parts of mattresses, which are made from padding and foam, wood, wire and metal springs. The padding and foam can be used to make carpet pads, leather seats and blankets. The wood can be recycled into compressed wood or wood chips and the wire and metal springs can be repurposed to make benches, metal posts and light poles. The top part cannot be repurposed, however, because of human contamination. To remedy this issue and make the mattresses 100 percent recyclable, Kiourtsis is looking to sell the tops to clean waste energy plants.



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"We'll separate the parts," she explained. "We have a bailer machine that smashes it down, bundles it up, and spits it out, and then according to whichever vendor we're using or working with, they'll come pick up whatever or we'll ship out the parts."

Her first contract was with the Village of Lynbrook, which agreed to work with her in early 2015. "They took a chance on it and said, 'You know what, let's go with it,' and we wanted to see if we were saving them money in the process," Kiourtsis said.

According to Lynbrook Village Clerk John Giordano, the village previously would bring almost 500 mattresses per year to the Covanta facility in Garden City, where it was charged \$70 per ton per mattress. But under Kiourtsis' system, the village is charged only per mattress. Giordano also said the village is saving payroll overtime fees because the mattresses are being collected the same day as other solid waste.

Department of Public Works Supervisor Phil Healey also said he was fond of the partnership. "It's been working out very well for us, and it's a great environmental program," he said.

Since then, Kiourtsis has partnered with several other municipalities, including the Town of Hempstead, which noted the program saves it \$12,000 annually in a press release last March.

She is also working with hotels in New York City, which have to replace their mattresses every five years. Guy Vincel, her trucking partner, picks up mattresses from 13 rooms from Hotel Sofitel New York, on West 44th Street, and drives it to her facility at the Oceanside Dock Hardware Supply once a week.

"We can usually fit 13 king-size beds and 26 twin-size box sets," said Vincel, the owner of Need It Now Delivers.

Still, Kiourtsis would like to expand her business. She is in talks to partner with the Town of Oyster Bay and the Village of Valley Stream. Businesses that partner with Renewable Recycling, Inc. receive a green check mark from the government to certify that they are working toward sustainable solutions.

Lynbrook residents who would like their mattress recycled are encouraged to call the DPW, at (516) 599-8838. Town of Hempstead residents can call the Town's Department of Sanitation at (516) 378-8484. Online pick-ups are available at renewablerecycling.com (<http://renewablerecycling.com/>).

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