

# Reduce, Reuse, Repeat

## Trash 2 Treasure celebrates 10 years of recycling

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Thursday, April 16, 2020

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When Lauren Banker '13, Alex Freid '13, Emily Spognardi '14, and Erica Vazza '14 walked to the Gables community room in May 2011, they had no idea how much would be donated to their new program, [Trash 2 Treasure](#) (T2T). “We knew students threw out a lot that could be reused,” says Vazza. “We didn’t know if they would choose to donate it.”

When they entered the community room, they were ecstatically overwhelmed by the number of lamps, couches, and other dorm items. “It looked like a pawn shop,” says Spognardi.

Ten years later, Trash 2 Treasure is a mainstay at UNH\*, keeping useful items out of the landfill and saving students and the university money. It is self-funded and student-led, which was a first for move-out donation programs when it started. It is the model for over 400 universities who implement student-led move-out programs.

The idea for T2T began when Freid and Banker were scavenging during moveout in May 2010. “We were able to collect nice furniture and items for free,” says Banker. There was so much we couldn’t take. It seemed like such a waste.”

When they returned in the fall, they connected with Vazza and Spognardi through the [Student Environmental Action Coalition](#) to implement their idea. They raised money for a spring collection through grants and organizing a silent auction. “We wanted this to be a community program,” says Banker. “We contacted local businesses to donate to the auction and everyone was supportive and enthusiastic.”

This was new and out of the students’ comfort zones. “I had never raised money or applied for a grant, but because I had my friends help and support, I jumped in,” says Spognardi. “You felt like you could make a difference because you had your friends’ support. They gave me confidence.”

What kept the students committed and energized? Each other. “T2T taught us how to lead collaboratively,” says Vazza. “We were juggling classes, jobs, life. We learned how to help each other and shift responsibilities. If someone was burnt out, others stepped in to help.”

This collaborative model was a boon for the students and the program. It facilitated the transition to new leaders each year. This structure inspired students at other universities to establish their own version. Freid created a national zero waste program with the help of UNH faculty, staff, and many Seacoast community members. This program became the [Post-Landfill Action Network \(PLAN\)](#), a nonprofit that works with over 400 colleges and universities and employs 10 full-time staff.

All four alums continue to give back to their communities. Banker and Vazza both work for UNH, Spognardi is a firefighter in Oregon, and Freid continues with PLAN and is a leader in the zero waste movement. “From managing volunteers to repairing toasters, Trash 2 Treasure taught me so much,” says Banker. “It taught me so much about myself and my ability to be a leader and empower others.”

*\*Due to the COVID-19 health crisis, Trash 2 Treasure is currently on hold and the program will resume once it is safe.*

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