For-profit USAgain gains approval to maintain clothes collection bins at municipal recycling center

Contending it is providing town residents with one more way to reduce their carbon footprint, the Saukville Town Board has approved the installation of USAgain clothing collection bins at its recycling center behind Town Hall.

USAgain representative Doug DeGroot explained that the for-profit company has been in business since 1999 and operates in 14 states.

The nearest bins are on the east boundary of the Village of Saukville, on the south side of Highway 33.

DeGroot said the company makes money by reselling used clothing and shoes in impoverished areas of the world, but also promotes a greater awareness of the impact consumers have on the environment.

“Something like 1 billion pounds of clothing are dumped in landfills each year, and researchers have shown that it takes about 700 of water and who knows how much pesticide to grow one pound of cotton,” he said.

“Our company sees that those textiles are reused. The clothing is cleaned and shipped to places like Haiti and Africa, where people are delighted to purchase them for 10 cents or whatever. There is a sense of satisfaction in buying their own clothes, just like any other shopper.”

DeGroot said the agreement the town approved will also trigger a $1 million liability insurance policy, ensuring that the town incurs no cost from the program.

The company will make a weekly collection of items placed in the bins, or more frequently if the volume dictates.

“We empty the bins we have in Grafton just about every other day,” DeGroot said.

While making collections around the region, DeGroot said he is amazed how much new clothing he has retrieved from the bins.

“People change their mind about some piece of clothing fits, or decide they don’t like the color but don’t want to throw it away,” he said.

DeGroot said the bins will also generate a little additional revenue for the town — 2 cents for every pound of clothing collected.

“This is not intended to be a money-maker for the town, but it should work well with our recycling program,” Town Chairman Barb Jobs said. I don’t see any reason why we shouldn’t give it a try.

“We can always have the bins taken away if they don’t work out.”

In response to a question about the for-profit nature of the business raised by Supr. Curt Rutkowski, DeGroot said the bins are clearly marked indicating that donations are not tax-deductible.

DeGroot said the company would also remove unwanted waste left at the bins, even if they are not discarded clothing.

“That becomes our problem. We’ll take care of it,” he said.

In the past, the town has had to pay to have unwanted items hauled away that were left illegally at its recycling center.