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UTEC program draws praise from The Boston Foundation

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BOSTON — One municipal official called UTEC's mattress-recycling program "a godsend."

A facilities manager described it as "tremendous."

A state official called the Lowell organization's work to prevent youth recidivism while also offering social benefits "incredible."

Members of UTEC traveled to The Boston Foundation on Thursday to tell the group's story and to present information about its mattress-recycling program. Ed Frechette, UTEC's director of social enterprise partner-

ships, spoke with a torn-open mattress in front of him to describe the various steps taken in the process.

Last year alone, UTEC brought in

about 20,000 mattresses and broke each one down to recycle its individual components — the steel springs go to a salvage yard, the foam becomes carbon padding and the wood is used for mulch.

And perhaps most importantly, Frechette said, the recycling program is a perfect fit for UTEC's goal of helping at-risk youths develop skills, learn life lessons and prepare themselves for a healthy future outside of prison.

"From our perspective, it's a perfect platform for youth employment because it's very labor intensive," Frechette said. "It's a great place to have a conversation

about what their life looks like."

Two of the young men UTEC serves

Please see **UTEC/4**



UTEC Executive Director Gregg Croteau speaks at Thursday's event.

SUN/CHRIS LISINSKI



Ed Frechette, UTEC's director of social enterprise partnerships, demonstrates aspects of the organization's mattress-recycling program at The Boston Foundation on Thursday. SUN/CHRIS LISINSKI

Mattress-recycling program draws praise

UTEC/From Page 3

also spoke about the impact the program had on their lives.

“They always tell you that you can do anything you want, if you put your mind to it, you can get it,” said Roger Roy, 21. “No limits.”

Massachusetts Secretary of Energy and Environmental Affairs Matthew Beaton said at Thursday’s event that UTEC’s programs have “great environmental benefit.” State officials estimate that about 600,000 mattresses enter the waste stream every year, Beaton said, and UTEC’s recycling efforts help hundreds of tons of those materials go to new use.

“There’s a huge market for this,” Beaton said. “If we can partner with groups like UTEC and help them expand their base, their customer base, and really make those linkages, that is an amazing thing.”

Beaton also complimented the impact UTEC makes on the lives of its members.

“The work that UTEC does on a day-to-day basis is just an absolutely incredible thing,” he said. “If we could emulate (it) across the state, we would be much better off. They are doing amazing, amazing work.”

(For what it’s worth, while introducing Beaton, UTEC Executive Director Gregg Croteau noted an interesting fact: while visiting the Lowell organization last year, Beaton set UTEC’s record for fastest mattress-slicing by an elected official.)



Massachusetts Secretary of Energy and Environmental Affairs Matthew Beaton speaks at an event.

SUN/CHRIS LISINSKI

After Beaton’s remarks, a panel of experts discussed UTEC’s impact and other strategies for ensuring sustainable disposal of mattresses. Jennifer Aronson, The Boston Foundation’s associate vice-president for programs, posed a simple question as a guiding thought for the panel.

“This stuff works,” she said while introducing UTEC’s programs. “How do we do more of it?”

Stephen Sarnosky, recycling coordinator for the Town of Framingham, said UTEC’s program was a “godsend” that has helped create an efficient and environmentally friendly way to deal with mattresses.

Another panelist, Northeastern University Residential Operations Manager Scott Peterson, said the school needs to dispose of 1,200 to 1,500 mattresses per year, creating an ideal partnership with UTEC.

“Using UTEC as an outlet is tremendous for the university,” Peterson said.

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