



# Human Faces

## Happily Scrapping Waste

A Florida component manufacturer's scrap wood donations help to improve the lives of children.

by Marisa Peters

**L**ike most truss plants, Deco Truss Company, Inc. in Princeton, FL has significant amounts of scrap wood left over from component fabrication. But what's different about Deco's scrap wood is that some of it, not having been used in some way in the truss plant, is made into cars and elephants.

This is not because Deco Truss has whittlers on staff, or because the company is making a profit selling its southern yellow pine scraps to old-fashioned toy makers. Rather, it's simply because Deco's vice president, Mario Espiñeira, Jr., is quick to contribute when asked for donations.



### In Search of Scrap

In this case, it was David E. Izquierdo who did the asking. Izquierdo and Espiñeira knew each other when they went to school together, but hadn't seen each other in 20 years. Then, a couple years ago, they met again while Izquierdo was in the process of building a new home; Deco was hired to design and fabricate the trusses for Izquierdo's house. Then, this past spring, Izquierdo approached Espiñeira to ask if Deco had any scrap wood they would be willing to donate.

Izquierdo was in search of scrap wood because he and his wife (Angela M. Vega) had recently opened their own branch of a non-profit organization called The Happy Factory, Inc. ([www.happyfactory.org](http://www.happyfactory.org)). The Happy Factory is a Utah-based organization that makes and donates wooden toys, operating under the motto "We may not be able to make a toy for every child in the world that needs one—but we're going to try!" Since founders Charles and Donna Cooley first began making toys in 1995, The Happy Factory has grown to include 30 factories scattered across 11 states, plus one in Brazil and one in England. The organization is completely dependant upon donations of time, money and materials. Regarding materials, a Happy Factory branch and a truss plant are perfect partners.

"When he (Izquierdo) came to me and said 'Do you think you can donate some wood?' I told him we could donate all he wanted," Espiñeira said. "I think he was

kind of like 'Why is he saying he'll give me all I want?' Then I took him out and showed him all the hoppers full of it."

According to Espiñeira, Deco has donated about a half a pickup bed full of wood so far. Izquierdo said about 1,000 toys were made from that amount, and donated to children's hospitals and shelters in Florida and Tennessee.

"And the amount that he [Espiñeira] gave us is such a small percentage of what he has available," Izquierdo said. "If I had the structure and volunteers, I would be able to make hundreds of thousands of toys."

### Pitching in, Wasting Less

Izquierdo and Vega decided they wanted to be part of The Happy Factory after they saw the organization featured on a show called Three Wishes on November 4, 2005. The show explained what The Happy Factory is, and how it donates handmade wooden toys to children both in the U.S. and abroad—some of whom have never before owned a toy. Izquierdo and Vega were so moved by what they saw on the show that they wrote a letter to The Happy Factory only a few days later, expressing their desire to help. Then, in February 2006, they opened their own branch—the first in the state of Florida.

"I have four kids, and I can't picture my kids without any toys," Izquierdo said. "So my wife and I decided that whatever we can do, as much money as we need to donate from our own pockets, without any limits or questions, we would do."

Espiñeira, who also donates Deco's scrap wood to an organization that makes it into shavings for horse bedding, said he appreciates what Izquierdo is doing. "When he [Izquierdo] came to me, I just thought it was the greatest idea."

Once Izquierdo had fashioned some of Deco's donated scraps into toys, he gave one to Espiñeira. "He [Izquierdo] brought me the first thing he made out of yellow pine," Espiñeira said. "It's a car, and it's beautiful. It's the cutest little car."

Various types of toy vehicles are a big portion of what Happy Factory branches produce and donate. Examples are pickup trucks, convertibles and milk trucks, with an elephant being the only non-vehicle toy. Happy Factory branches are required to follow headquarters' regulations regarding the toys they make, and all are limited to a pre-approved set. They receive aluminum molds from The Happy Factory headquarters, and these molds are used to make every toy. However, branches may choose how many to make of each approved design, or they may choose to concentrate on only one or two different styles.

Running a Happy Factory branch is now a part of his and his wife's daily life, Izquierdo said. His four children, who range in age from four to 16, are also involved. Though it is hard work, the family receives a lot of satisfaction from being part of The Happy Factory. "It's definitely given us a new view in

## how you can help:

The Happy Factory, Inc. ([www.happyfactory.org](http://www.happyfactory.org)) willingly accepts donations of time, money and materials. Visit their website to find more information about how to contribute, or to locate The Happy Factory branch closest to you. If you would like to help, you may either volunteer your personal time to help construct toys, or make a monetary donation that will buy wheels and axles for the toys. Donations of materials are also appreciated. This may include scrap wood, glue, sandpaper and mineral oil, among other things, said David E. Izquierdo, Happy Factory branch operator.

life," said Izquierdo. "It's a wonderful reason for being."

As for Espiñeira, he was very willing to contribute to The Happy Factory's cause by helping out his local branch. "It's such an easy thing," he said. "There's so much scrap wood. I mean, they really do all the work. All we're doing is giving it [scrap wood] to them for free."

And Izquierdo may soon be requesting more of Deco's scrap wood. "Everything is possible through generous [donors] like Deco Truss," he said. "Actually, I need more wood, so I've got to call Mario." **SBC**

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### at a glance

- Deco Truss donates wood scrap left over from component fabrication to Happy Factory, a company that makes toys.
- Deco has donated about a half a pickup bed full of wood so far, which was enough material to make 1,000 toys for hospitals and shelters in Florida and Tennessee.
- David Izquierdo and his family opened Florida's first Happy Factory branch in February.

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