

# EARLHAM

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## News from Public Mfair:

Contact: Kevin Burk  
Director of Media Relations, 765/983-132

**news**

## Building Community, a Computer at a Time

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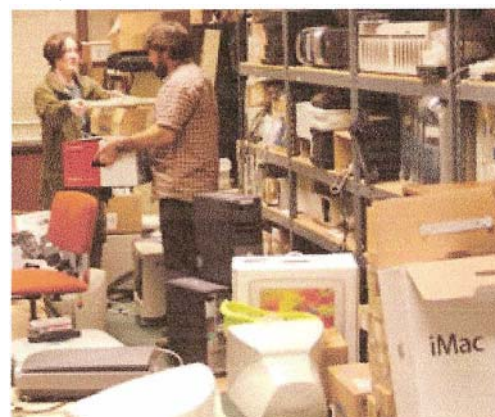
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RICHMOND, Ind. - A ground breaking partnership between Earlham College and Indianapolis-based Workforce, Inc., will soon help provide central Indiana with solutions to a number of modern social ills, from hazardous waste contamination of regional landfills to dead beat dads and even the crime rate.

As its part of the agreement, Earlham will donate thousands of pieces of College-owned or acquired computer equipment for "demanufacturing" by RecycleForce, LLC, a recovery and recycling operation located in Sherman Park on the east side of the Hoosier capital. RecycleForce - dedicated to preventing discarded computer equipment containing toxic chemicals from entering the normal waste stream - employs many exoffenders associated with Workforce, Inc., a nonprofit group committed to strengthening Indiana families by providing back-to-work programs for formerly incarcerated parents.

Both ventures are the creation of former Earlham student and current Indianapolis entrepreneur Gregg Keesling. After a successful career managing and owning a number of hotel properties in western Jamaica (where he served as chairman of the Jamaica Hotel and Tourism Association from 1992-95), Keesling returned to his native Indiana in 1996 to establish a -taffing and workforce development firm - Keys to Work, Inc. - helping at-risk workers find sustainable jobs. In 2003, he resigned as CEO of Keys to launch Workforce, Inc.

Betsy Ward, database administrator, and



Tom Steffes, director of computing services, stack still more obsolete equipment in "Computer Canyon," the pile of surplus equipment that dominates most of the "work area" of Computing Services on the lower floor of Lilly Library. Less than two years after disposing of 20 pallets of old College-owned machines through a commercial waste handler, some storage spaces on campus are again quickly filling up with no longer useful monitors, processing units, keyboards, printers and other devices. As part of a newly forged partnership with WorkForce, Inc., and RecycleForce, LLC, of

Indianapolis, much of this excess inventory will soon be shipped out for appropriate "de-manufacturing."

"Seventy percent of all jobs are cut off to persons with a 'D' felony," says Keesling, describing the lowest criminal category in Indiana law encompassing such offenses as fraud, forgery, obstruction of justice and perjury, but also theft of cable television signals, making a false bill of sale and, in some cases, trespassing.

"A person can't even work at Burger King with a 'D' felony," Keesling says, explaining that Workforce, Inc., is organized to provide ex-inmates with up to six-months of support - in



## Work, Responsibility and Reward

The second-largest state agency in Indiana, with a biennial budget of \$1.2 billion, is the Department of Corrections (DOC).

At the rate we're going, says Keesling, brother of Quakers football coach Gerry Keesling '82, in two to four years the DOC may well surpass the Family and Social Services Administration (FSSA) as Indiana's largest fiscal and social responsibility. He's convinced that projects like WorkForce and RecycleForce "are parts of a new paradigm we have to look at" as a gradual substitute for the rudimentary incarcerate, confine and release priso programs found in most states.

"We call what we do 'Work, Responsibility and Reward,'" Keesling says, adding that 24 e: offenders have found jobs at RecycleForce since the shop opened its doors in January 2006. To date none has violated parole and been returned to jail. Although one has mOVE on to become assistant manager for a home improvement store and another is now enrolled in restaurant manager training. Several more have earned their commercial drivers licenses.

Currently 12 former prisoners man the work benches at RecycleForce. Keesling's goal is to soon double that number. He expects the expansion to lead to additional positions in "material handling," as well.

"If we're truly going to rebuild communities, rebuild lives and families, then these men mu have a role," says Keesling. "If we lose these entry and re-entry level jobs to some place else, it really does impact the availability of employment opportunities for our at-risk populations. And then what?"

If only the projected rate of increase in the DOC's budget during the next few years could actually be held flat, Indiana could instead pay for its long-touted but much-delayed all-da kindergarten program "eight, nine or ten times over," Keesling says.

"Think of the long-term contributions of that to our state and society."

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Contact:  
Tom Steffes, director of computing services  
765/983-1366 - E-Mail Tom

Kevin Burke, director of media relations  
765/983-1323 - E-Mail Kevin

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Earlham College- 801 National Road West- Richmond, Indiana 47374-4095 Send  
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