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Tool library coming to Boulder's ReSource yard

Organizers: Not everyone needs to buy a post hole digger

By Laura Snider Camera Staff Writer

Posted: 08/15/2010 04:28:06 PM MDT

How to vote

The ReSource Tool Library is a finalist to receive a \$20,000 grant from Tom's of Maine to help defray startup costs. The five winners will be determined by an online vote. For more information on the tool library, or to cast your vote, visit conservationcenter.org/ToolLibrary.htm and follow the link.

Boulder's Adam Jackaway was driving a camper van up the West Coast of Australia on a "back-road, desolate highway" when an idea lodged itself in his brain.

Why, he wondered, doesn't Boulder have a tool library? And then -- since Boulder seems like the kind of place that would be amenable to such an idea -- why shouldn't he be the one to start one?

Jackaway concedes that it's an odd sort of inspiration to be struck with, but once the vision of starting a tool-sharing program wiggled its way into his thoughts, he couldn't shake it. It seemed a perfect fit for what he was searching for -- a career that provided a simple, tangible, local way for people to reduce their impact on the environment.

"I spent the next two hours sort of frantically wondering if anyone was working on one yet," he said. "So I found a very lonely gas station that had pay-as-you-go Internet, and I sat there in the sweltering heat for about an hour with a painfully slow connection searching for some indication of a past or present tool library. I managed to convince myself that no one else was working on it."

Jackaway -- who has spent 15 years focusing on energy efficiency and sustainable design in the world of architecture -- had found his next calling.

It's been a year since Jackaway pulled into that dusty gas station, and he reckons that the tool library, which he is opening in collaboration with Boulder's well-established Center for ReSource Conservation, will be open late this fall, perhaps as early as the end of September. The library will be attached to ReSource, the center's yard that accepts and resells reusable building materials.

The idea is pretty simple.

"Not everyone needs to own a post hole digger," said Shaun LaBarre, ReSource Director. "We have a lot of people in the community who have the carpentry skills to be able to use our materials (available at ReSource), but they may not be able to afford the tools."

Most people also do not need to own their own demolition hammers, hedge trimmers, electric snakes and weed eaters -- which are among the most popular tools checked out at the Tool Lending Library in Berkeley, Calif., which has been around since 1979.

Other popular tools at the Berkeley program -- which is now part of the city's public library system, so all you need to check out a table saw is a library card in good standing -- include ladders, cement mixers, hand trucks, dollies, plumbing tools, pipe threaders, circular saws, drills extension cords and wheelbarrows.

In all, there are about two dozen tool libraries already in operation around the country, and Jackaway, whose current title is tool library launch manager, has talked to them all in the course of his research.

"They're all doing great," he said. "They span the entire country -- north to south, east to west. They're everything from little small ones that are open on Saturdays in the summer to big ones that are open four to five days a week."

Because the [Boulder County](#) tool library will be attached to ReSource, which is already open seven days a week, the program will likely start life as one of the most accessible libraries in the country.

Jackaway said his research of other tool libraries has also shown him that a tool-sharing program and local hardware stores can peacefully coexist.

"There's sometimes questions of, 'What do local retailers think of this concept?'" he said. "Tool libraries across the country have great relationships with local hardware stores. It's a win-win because virtually all tool usage is accompanied by the necessary purchase of non-returnable items. You might borrow a cordless screwdriver, but you still need screws."

And while some of the details still need to be worked out, Jackaway and LaBarre say they know the basic structure. Anyone living in the county -- and local nonprofits -- can join the library for an annual fee, which will likely be in the neighborhood of \$20 or \$25 for individuals. Tools will be available for a small daily fee, which will vary for tools but likely range from 50 cents to a couple of bucks.

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The Center for ReSource Conservation believes that the fees will allow the tool library to ultimately become financially self-sufficient. But to start, Jackaway is busy applying for grants, recruiting volunteers and organizing community tool drives. The ReSource Tool Library is now a finalist for a \$20,000 grant from Tom's of Maine, which is deciding the winners with an online vote.

Jackaway said he hopes the effort will accomplish several goals -- reduce consumption, encourage do-it-yourself home projects and enable nonprofits to take on more community service projects that require tools -- all of which are easier to explain to people than the tasks he used to work on as an architect, such as creating complex heat recovery systems for commercial buildings.

"What a joy it's been to explain this project," he said. "It's a tool library; it does what you think it does. It's the 15-second elevator pitch with five seconds to spare."

Contact Camera Staff Writer Laura Snider at 303-473-1327 or sniderl@dailycamera.com.

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MALACL · 4 days ago

+6

What a great idea!

I looked up that you can vote for the Toms of Maine contest here: [http://www.tomsomaine.com/community-involvement/...](http://www.tomsomaine.com/community-involvement/)

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YagoSays · 4 days ago

+3

Cool idea. But aren't libraries free to users? Would this be just another place to rent tools, but cheaper?

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ADJBoulder · 4 days ago

+2

Generally, yes. But aside from the Berkeley and Oakland Tool Libraries, which are part of the public library system (as cited in the article), almost all of the nation's existing tool libraries charge membership fees, and many charge small handling fees for some of their inventory - such as rototillers, etc. Unfortunately, with such limited revenue streams, most tool libraries are also only able to be open for very limited hours (and often only twice per week) and are constantly in search of outside funding sources. Our goal is to strike a path that balances afford-ability, quality, efficiency, and daily service - in a nonprofit context that also provides educational opportunities and support for the missions and projects of the region's vibrant nonprofit community. We hope this balance will strike a chord in Boulder. Finally, regarding rental comparisons; the local tool rental agencies generally offer only a limited inventory (or focus primarily on larger, construction grade equipment), and none carry a selection of the most basic hand and gardening tools. We aim to fill that niche. - Kind regards, Adam.

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BBolder · 4 days ago

+3

Excellent. I'll be there.

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SJG_2010 · 4 days ago

+2

So I am guessing that if you donate a bunch of tools, then they will waive the yearly fee depending on the value of the donation?

I have a ton of tools that I rarely use. I would donate a LOT if I knew I could borrow them back at no

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 [ADJBoulder](#) · 4 days ago +2  

This is indeed the current plan. While you will still be required to become a member of the Library, all tools donated by citizens will be theirs to use, for free, for the duration of their memberships. We hope this will provide an incentive for people to donate some of their lesser-used tools, and perhaps some of their duplicates. For example, I now own both an older corded circular saw and a newer cordless circular saw. I rarely use the old one anymore, and I will be donating it to the library. But it's comforting to know that I will be able to come by and pick it up (or its equivalent), for free, if I ever need it again. Stay tuned for our 'Community Tool Drives', coming in September. We'd be most grateful for any tools you can donate. - Kind regards, Adam

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 [SJK_2010](#) · 4 days ago +2  

And of course there is a cost associated with keeping all of the tools in working order. If they did not (maintain them), then there would be liability issues if someone hurt themselves with a tool that was not maintained properly. I am all for a fee based system. I have MANY tools that I purchased for a one time use because it was almost as expensive to rent one.

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 [clupp](#) · 4 days ago +1  

Agreed. I can't think of how many tools I've bought for 1 project. It will be great to borrow and share, even if there is a cost. It's hard to rent any small or rarely used tools. Great idea for those of us that do DIY projects, but can't afford a garage full of tools.

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 [ballzonya](#) · 4 days ago +3  

Oooh a library full of tools! I wonder if they'll have the George W Bush autobiography there?

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 [yaakovwatkins](#) · 3 days ago +1  

I hope they have liability insurance to cover defective tools.

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