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For Immediate Release

SURPLUS FROM SAN MATEO JUVENILE DETENTION CENTER AIDS JAMAICAN SCHOOLS

(San Mateo, October 28) San Mateo County has contributed more than ten tons of surplus assets to poverty relief in Jamaica from demolition of its Hillcrest Juvenile Detention Center.

The County opened a new juvenile center in 2006, replacing a structure dating from the 1940s. The County took all the furniture it could use in the new facility, and gave away more to other agencies and local charities. But there was still some usable furniture and equipment left over. In addition to an assortment of desks and tables and other movable items, there were some bulky pieces that needed special disassembly and handling, including a walk-in freezer and roof-mounted solar panels.

The old building was scheduled for demolition this summer. The County has an aggressive policy to reuse or recycle as much as possible from every project. Project Manager Mike Ramirez made a connection with IRN – the Institution Recycling Network, which matches usable surplus with a network of U.S. and international charities for relief and development projects. IRN told Ramirez they could pull the surplus out of the building and find it a new home.

It was a challenging project. The building was a maze of hallways with long carry distances and only one point for truck access. In the years since 2006 it has been a training site for local fire crews, who wrecked walls and ceilings, broke down doors, and generally left the place in shambles. There was no water, no lights, and no electricity. And with paperwork and schedule delays, the County was left with only three days to empty the old assets before abatement contractors got on site.

But it got done. IRN connected with Deconstruction and Reuse Network from San Francisco to disassemble the solar panels and other built-ins, and Graebel, Inc. from San Jose to move the smaller pieces of surplus. Over three days in June the surplus was moved and packed for shipment. One crew on the roof with a crane dismantled and dropped the solar panels to the ground. Another crew took apart the freezer, dismantled doors, and took down wall-mounted cabinets and blackboards. Movers shuttled back and forth taking everything to a shipping container outside the back door. By the end of Day 3 just about everything that could possibly be used again had been moved and packed.

In late September the County saw the final results – photos of San Mateo surplus in Jamaica and in use. Says Project Manager Ramirez, “One item really stood out. It was an old stainless steel sink unit. We could barely get it out the door and it took about eight guys to get it into the trailer. We really had to ask if it was worth it. Then we got photos back of the sink all polished up, in a school for the blind in Jamaica. That gave us our answer: Yes, it was really worth it.”

Ramirez adds that the project was smart financially as well. “We had to move all the stuff anyway to prepare for abatement,” he says. “And once it was out of the building, it was just as easy to load trailers for reuse than throw it in dumpsters. Apart from some extra planning and management, there was really no extra cost. Combine that with the environmental benefit and the knowledge that we helped some really needy people, and it was one hundred percent the right thing to do.”

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A case study of this project can be found at:

www.irnsurplus.com/docs/San%20Mateo%20Hillcrest%20Case%20Study%20DR1%202010-07.pdf

Photos of the Hillcrest sink going grave-to-cradle from Hillcrest to a school in Jamaica are at:

<http://picasaweb.google.com/recycling.network/GraveToCradleSanMateoHillcrestSink#>