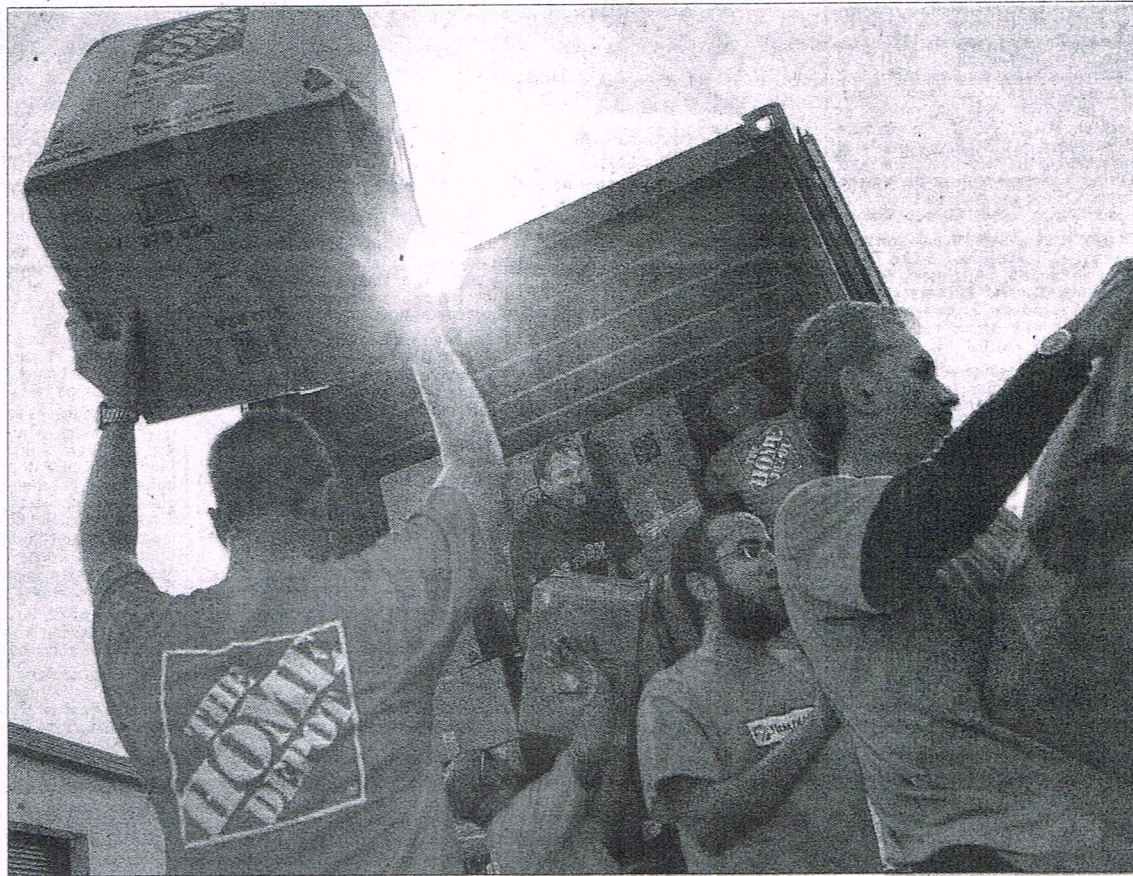


LAKE WORTH



STAFF PHOTOS BY ALLEN EYESTONE / THE PALM BEACH POST

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Woman collects caps for a cause

The community helps her ship tons of plastic tops to a French charity.





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By Hana Engroff
Palm Beach Post Staff Writer

A plastic cap weighs less than an ounce. Valerie Jones collected 7 tons of them.

Jones, of Lake Worth, has been gathering plastic caps for about nine years. She looks for all shapes and sizes – from Coke caps to Zephyrhills caps to toothpaste tube caps.

She gives them to a European charity named Les Bouchons d'Amour, meaning The Caps of Love in French. The organization recycles the plastic for money, which is used to purchase wheelchairs and trained service dogs for children with disabilities who can't afford them in Europe and Africa.

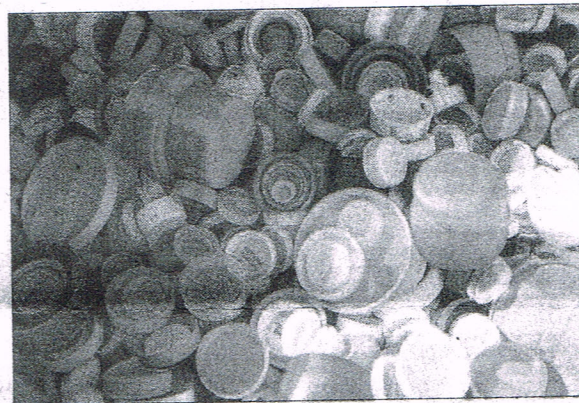
"It's taking something that is basically trash," Jones said. "We're giving it a value."

On Wednesday, 210 boxes of caps that Jones had packed into a donated storage unit at Southern Self Storage on Hypoluxo Road for the past 13 months were picked up by Anheuser-Busch. The company is shipping them from the Port of Palm Beach to a recycling plant in Belgium for free; it would have cost \$4,000, she said.

The 14,000 pounds of caps were loaded into a shipping container by an assembly line of



Valerie Jones has collected plastic caps of all sizes for nine years for the charity.



about 25 people, which included volunteers from the Home Depot on Lantana Road, where Jones is a manager.

The collection has been a community effort, she said, with schools, churches and even a recreational men's hockey team in Lake Worth helping.

It was one of the hockey team members that snagged her the offer from Anheuser-Busch. Before that, she had been packing caps in suitcases whenever she traveled to France to visit her sister and recruiting help from Home Depot to pay to ship them.

Now she's looking for recycling plants in the U.S. that will pay for the grade of plastic that caps are made of, so she can start a U.S. chapter of The Caps of Love and not have to ship them. Each ton of plastic is worth about \$375, depending on its purity, she said.

She said she spends at least 10 hours a week working on the cap collection, including making

weekly pickups from places like Royal Palm School near Lantana, which has been one of her biggest contributors.

The school, which instructs students with special needs, turned the collection into a project about four years ago, said Sally Mrazovich, the school's media director and volunteer and business partner coordinator.

"The students are learning about these countries that the caps are going to," Mrazovich said. "We're helping them, and they're helping us."

Jones said she needs all the help she can get. It takes 10 tons of caps to buy a wheelchair and 61 tons for a service dog. The Caps of Love has provided more than 200 wheelchairs and 20 service dogs so far. The 7 tons being shipped Wednesday are going toward a service dog.

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