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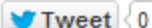
Commencement 2012 | Graduates to wear gowns made of recycled bottles

By Alexandra Hitzler

Staff Writer

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Graduates will help preserve the environment as they take part in commencement this year.

Almost 100,000 plastic bottles were used to make the Unifi Manufacturing Inc. Repreve gowns that Syracuse University and SUNY-ESF students will wear at this year's commencement.

"These gowns are a one-time-use product. It was very important to make them from Repreve, helping to reduce their overall environmental impact," said Tom Carew, vice president and general manager of the cap and gown division of Herff Jones, the manufacturer of this year's gowns.

SU is one of 140 universities and colleges using Repreve gowns this year, Carew said.

Each gown made with Repreve uses about 29 recycled plastic bottles, Carew said. Herff Jones estimates that 7 million plastic bottles were used to manufacture the 240,000 Repreve gowns used by graduates this spring.

"We're doing our best to educate people on how recycling and choosing products made with Repreve can have a positive impact on the environment," Carew said.

SU has been looking into using recycled gowns for several years, said Susan Germain, executive director of special events.



Micah Benson | Contributing Illustration

"We've been doing research about the gowns, but in the past, the fabric has been scratchy and not very appealing," Germain said. "This year, the fabric has improved tremendously, and we thought the move to recycled gowns just made sense."

The possibility of using recycled gowns interested SU officials because it aligned with Chancellor Nancy Cantor's commitment to making the university eco-friendly, Germain said.

After commencement, graduates can donate their gowns back to the manufacturer to be recycled again into new products, Germain said. Boxes for the donations will be set up in the Carrier Dome and in the SU Bookstore at the Schine Student Center.

Germain said the response to the gowns from graduates and families has been very positive.

"We really haven't received any negative feedback about the gowns," Germain said. "A lot of people think that these gowns are a better quality than the ones we've used in the past."

Ronald Harvey, a senior civil engineering major, said he thinks the switch to recycled gowns promotes an important message to the rest of the SU community.

"I think it's a good start for the university to maintain a green atmosphere on campus," Harvey said. "It's a message that can help pave the way for more people to recycle."

Jonathan Raad, a senior international relations, Middle Eastern studies and energy and its impacts major, said he was proud to hear the university chose to use recycled gowns for his graduation.

"I think it shows that SU is moving toward a greener, more sustainable future," Raad said. "It's a small way that the Class of 2012 can make a difference."

adhitzle@syr.edu