Graham Hill: Living with less

This weekend marks the beginning of the traditional Christmas shopping season.

Area residents will join millions of consumers across the country maxing out their credit cards buying lots of stuff, most of which won’t be used.

Last week, another self-storage facility was proposed in Lower Pottsgrove.

The facility owner said the average renter visits his unit only twice every 13 months. So people really don’t use the stuff they have — they just like knowing it’s there.

Below are the thoughts of one young millionaire who decided he really didn’t need lots of stuff and wrote about it in the New York Times. Living with Less. A Lot Less.

By Graham Hill (excerpts)

I LIVE in a 420-square-foot studio.

I sleep in a bed that folds down from the wall. I have six dress shirts. I have 10 shallow bowls that I use for salads and main dishes. When people come over for dinner, I pull out my extendable dining room table. I don’t have a single CD or DVD and I have 10 percent of the books I once did.

I have come a long way from the life I had in the late ’90s, when, flush with cash from an Internet consultancy company, Sitwerks, for more money than I thought I’d earn in a lifetime.

To celebrate, I bought a four-story, 3,600-square-foot, turn-of-the-century house in Seattle’s happening Capitol Hill neighborhood and, in a frenzy of consumption, bought a brand-new sectional couch ... a ton of gadgets ... And, of course, a black turbocharged Volvo. With a remote starter!

I was working hard ... and didn’t have the time to finish getting everything I needed for my house. So I hired a ... personal shopper. He went to furniture, appliance and electronics stores and took Polaroids of things he thought I might like to fill the house; I’d shuffle through the pictures and proceed on a virtual shopping spree.

My success and the things it bought quickly changed from novel to normal. Soon I was numb to it all. The new Nokia phone didn’t excite me or satisfy me. It didn’t take long before I started to wonder why my theoretically upgraded life didn’t feel any better and why I felt more anxious than before.

... Our fondness for stuff affects almost every aspect of our lives. Housing size, for example, has ballooned in the last 60 years — more than twice as large as in 1950. We take up more than three times the amount of space per capita than we did 60 years ago.

... Enormous consumption has global, environmental and social consequences. ... Many experts believe consumerism and all that it entails — from the extraction of resources to manufacturing to waste disposal — plays a big part in pushing our planet to the brink.

... Does all this endless consumption result in measurably increased happiness?

... (Today) as the guy who started TreeHugger.com, I sleep better knowing I’m not using more resources than I need. I have less — and enjoy more.