

Recycle Ann Arbor

► Model Program Puts Community Before Profit

By Laura Biernat

Recycle Ann Arbor has been a leader in recycling and waste reduction since starting its curbside recycling program in 1978. Launched as a truly grassroots effort with nothing more than a flatbed truck equipped with 50-gallon barrels and the hard work of countless volunteers, Recycle Ann Arbor has matured into one of the country's top ten recycling programs.

The organization has received numerous achievement awards, including 2001 Recyclers of the Year from the Michigan Recycling Coalition, and recognition as a model program from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

Once a completely volunteer-based organization, Recycle Ann Arbor now employs 35 people and has a budget of \$3.5 million. It serves over 46,000 single- and multi-family households, and over 500 businesses in Ann Arbor through its curbside recycling program.



Recycle Ann Arbor's Ted Warren helps Karen Griffin and Maurice Manning look over a used lawnmower at the ReUse Center.

PHOTO: TED STUMPFER

Melinda Uerling, Recycle Ann Arbor's Executive Director, says that the organization has been able to flourish while many other non-profit recyclers have vanished by "establishing deep-rooted ties to the community; establishing a level of trust with them

with the Ecology Center, its parent non-profit organization. The Ecology Center's community organizing campaigns continue to be instrumental in building and maintaining public and political support for recycling in Ann Arbor.

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"We feel such a strong connection to Ann Arbor," Uerling says, "and a strong sense of responsibility. Ann Arbor is such a great community, filled with hard-working intellectual types, and their commitment to the environment has always been solid."

Also crucial to Recycle Ann Arbor's success is its long-standing relationship

Although Recycle Ann Arbor will celebrate its 30th anniversary in 2008, Uerling says the organization sees no reason to rest upon its good reputation in the community.

"Being a non-profit doesn't preclude being successful – we operate our organization very much like a business," Uerling says. "We aim to provide self-sustaining programs and activities, because success for us means



PHOTO: TED STUMPFER

In 2004, the Drop-Off Station served over 64,000 Washtenaw County residents and businesses, 25% of the population, for both its recycling and compost services.

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Completely self-supporting through service contracts, service fees and sales revenues, Recycle Ann Arbor has been able to expand its recycling and waste reduction initiatives by creating other community based services that require very little public funding.

Curbside Recycling

In 2004, according to figures compiled by the Institute for Local Self Reliance, recycling efforts in Ann Arbor recovered 53% of materials from the waste stream, equal to 23,558 tons of materials that would have ended up in landfills. Ann Arbor households generate over 500 pounds of recyclables each year, apart from yard waste collection. This figure puts Ann Arbor in the top ten communities for recycling recovery rates in the nation. As an orga-

nization, Recycle Ann Arbor recovered and recycled close to 34 million pounds of materials across all programs.

Recycle Ann Arbor recently joined forces with the Ecology Center to reinvigorate the grassroots outreach network that was a key part of educating city residents about the curbside program before it became a city-provided service. Now known as the Neighborhood Action Network, the program's new focus is to provide targeted outreach and promotion in areas where participation falls below typical rates. Utilizing over 200 volunteers, the Neighborhood Action Network has focused primarily on areas with highly transient populations.

Drop-Off Station

In January 1997, Recycle Ann Arbor moved its regional Drop-Off Station (DOS) to its current location at 2950 East Ellsworth Road to make it more convenient for Washtenaw County residents and to be able to accept a wider variety of materials. The DOS comprehensive

list of acceptable materials includes all recyclables accepted at the curb as well as difficult-to-recycle items such as textiles, shoes, cell phones, rechargeable batteries, car tires, auto fluids, fluorescent light tubes, Freon appliances, televisions, computers, stereos, micro-waves, CDs, and plastic bags. Some recyclable items require a fee.

In 2004, the DOS served over 64,000 Washtenaw County residents and businesses, 25% of the population, for both its recycling and compost services. The DOS recently expanded its recycling services to include electronics and computers. Since April 2001, the DOS has accepted over 1.4 million pounds of electronics for recycling.

ReUse Center

In 1997, Recycle Ann Arbor opened the ReUse Center, a 20,000 square-foot retail outlet for donated building materials, furniture, appliances, sporting goods and more. Since 2000, the ReUse Center has experienced an explosion in

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Durable goods make up almost 90% of the ReUse Center's sales. The quality of items have increased over the years, partly due to the free pick-up service provided weekly for donations valued over \$75.

The ReUse Center also regularly responds to requests from social service agencies for families in need of furniture, appliances, and other household items. In 2004, these contributions totaled \$12,000 in donated merchandise. Recycle Ann Arbor has a charitable-giving goal of 5% of net sales and actively seeks additional referrals.

Environmental House

In 1999, the Environmental House was established as an educational resource on sustainable building and energy efficiency to community residents. A demonstration home was built using renewable and energy-efficient building products as a place for community members to learn more about alternative building choices.

In the past two years, Recycle Ann Arbor's Environmental House has been the driving force behind the creation of a local partnership of builders, architects, and other professionals committed to sustainable building practices known as the Washtenaw Green Building Coalition. The WGBC is currently seeking local and regional partner organizations to collaborate on low- and affordable-housing sustainable building initiatives. This collaboration is known as the Great Lakes Green Building Alliance.

Currently led by a LEED-certified, HERS-qualified architect, the Environmental House has recently begun to offer Home Energy Ratings, for a fee, for both new and older homes. A

For more information about Recycle Ann Arbor's many programs and services, or to volunteer, inquire at info@recycleannarbor.org, visit www.recycleannarbor.org, or call (734) 662-6288.

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**— Melinda Uerling,
Recycle Ann Arbor's
Executive Director**



Home Energy Rating can often provide new-home buyers with more purchasing power if the house is found to be energy efficient. The Home Energy Rating projects how much the homeowner will save on energy costs, which can then be used by the consumer to secure a higher mortgage loan amount. For current homeowners or those pur-

RecycleWorks

Recycle Ann Arbor's commercial recycling program, RecycleWorks currently serves approximately 200 businesses in the Washtenaw and western Wayne County areas. RecycleWorks provides for-fee recycling and document destruction services for under-

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chasing older homes, the Home Energy Rating can help people either refinance or finance their homes with additional money allocated towards home energy improvements within the loan.

Later this year, the Environmental House plans to install a 10kW solar demonstration system that will greet visitors to the ReUse Center and Recycle Ann Arbor's offices at 2420 South Industrial Highway. Plans include a complete remodeling of the Environmental House to incorporate new meeting space, updated product displays, and new educational displays on sustainable building.

served small and medium sized businesses. In addition to traditional office paper and cardboard recycling, RecycleWorks accepts electronics, laser/printer cartridges, mixed containers, pallets, Styrofoam, fluorescent tubes, and metals.

Laura Biernat is Marketing Coordinator for Recycle Ann Arbor.



Happy customers at Recycle Ann Arbor's ReUse Center.

PHOTO: RECYCLE ANN ARBOR