

RESIDENTIAL RECYCLING CONFERENCE

In business: Students start, operate recycling route

By Jim Johnson
WRN senior reporter

CHICAGO — Rexburg is a small town in rural Idaho, where finding a job can be a challenge for the large population of students who attend Brigham Young University-Idaho.

With a student population of about 17,000, the university is not much smaller than Rexburg itself, with its 25,000 or so residents.

One thing the community does have, however, is recyclables.

And that means a growing number of jobs for BYU-Idaho students getting involved in a fledgling recycling program that's run on campus and serves the entire community.

"This program was strictly about creating jobs, making sure we can get students through college without too much debt, provide for their needs as well," said Nathan Woodbury, a junior and marketing manager for the program.

With a university garbage truck that was being used only three hours a day for trash collections in the morning, the school saw an opportunity to also handle recyclables with the same vehicle.

Proceeds from the sale of those materials go to pay the salaries of students working in the recycling program. Students work about 15 hours per week and receive wages of \$8 to \$8.50 per hour, Woodbury said.

The recycling program has experienced tremendous growth since starting not that long ago.

"Originally it was about five or six students who were doing the recycling on campus," Woodbury, a business management major, said. "Now, though, as the program expands we have about 45 employees. We hope to get that up to about 80 by the end of the year."

Recyclables collected by a side-loader are brought to a MRF on campus. Students use a rudimentary picking line, created from surplus equipment, to recover plastic, metals, paper and glass.

The city helped launch the program by purchasing single-stream carts for its residents to use and a new baler for the MRF. The municipality, in turn, is able to avoid disposal costs for recyclables that formerly went to a landfill.

Materials are shoveled by hand into a hopper that drops recyclables onto an old agricultural conveyor belt that serves as the basis for the picking line. A half-dozen or so students stand on either side of the line and sort materials to be baled and recycled.

Jeff Wynn is grounds supervisor for the university and is in charge of overseeing the program.

"We're about a year into it. A year ago we were sorting on a ping pong table. We actually were. ... That's what we had, that's how we started," he said.

"In a town where it's hard to get jobs, it's been really good for the campus, the community and the kids," he said.

Students and staff from BYU-Idaho, a sister school to Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah,

recently attended the Residential Recycling Conference in Chicago to learn more about the recycling industry and spread the word about their experiences. They hoped to show other communities and schools that recycling programs to benefit student workers can be developed with a little cost and a lot of cooperation.

"We've only been operating for about a year. We're not incredibly experienced in the field. We're doing a lot of trial and error. A lot of this trip for us is to

try and network, to figure out what is out there, what other people are doing as well as to say, 'Hey, we've got a program that works' and we'd like to see if other people would be interested in it as well," Woodbury said.

A key to the program's success has been community support. They have close to a 97% participation rate among residents and purity level of the recyclables is at about 93%. Residents are not charged for recycling.

"A lot of that is due to our resi-

dents. They are very well educated, and they are excited about the program. They are happy to have it," Woodbury said.

Randy White is a senior business management operations major and is general manager of the recycling operation this semester as an internship.

"One thing I've noticed about recycling, there's a lot of curveballs," White said. "The commodity market drops, rearranging lines to meet the needs of the end buyer."

Revenue for the program has

risen dramatically as the students spent much of 2012 organizing the effort. Completion of delivery of the 96-gallon collection carts to residents by the city last fall also has allowed the effort to ramp up more quickly.

The program earned about \$20,000 in 2012 and expects to bring in \$300,000 this year. Projections are \$500,000 for 2014.

"It's getting better every day," Wynn said. "I'm kind of excited to see what it will be like in a year, two years, three years out." ■

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