RCC launching multi-faceted recycling campaign

A new recycling program at Rogue Community College will sharply reduce the amount of waste being trucked to landfills and serve as a “living laboratory” to promote recycling awareness.

Funded by a $30,000 grant from the region’s Solid Waste Agency, the program will kick off Jan. 11 on the RCC Redwood Campus in Grants Pass, said Britta Beckstead, program coordinator. An AmeriCorps volunteer, Beckstead is spending the current academic year at RCC getting the program up and running. RCC’s Green Team wrote the grant proposal, and members are participating on an advisory board. The other members of this advisory board include representatives from Southern Oregon Sanitation, the Solid Waste Agency, and SPARC Enterprises.

The campaign will cut RCC’s garbage output by at least 20 percent, Beckstead noted. Some Oregon colleges with long-running programs have removed upwards of 60 percent from their garbage stream.

Southern Oregon Sanitation has donated 44 collection bins and a 20-yard dumpster. The bins, sited around the campus, will accept comingled paper, cardboard, waste paper, aluminum cans, and plastic bottles. RCC student workers will use a converted golf cart, set up with a loading ramp, to haul the 65-gallon bins to the dumpster. An Indiana-based firm, Vestil Manufacturing, has constructed a recycling bin dumper to reduce risks of worker injuries.

“Most people take it for granted that what we throw in the trash goes away — out of sight, out of mind. But there are huge implications, human and environmental, of this ‘throw away’ attitude,” Beckstead said. “If we want to leave a livable earth for future generations, we have got to do something about it. We have that opportunity now at RCC and in the Josephine County community,” she added.

The program also will create a recycling activity laboratory as an educational resource for Josephine County. A 10-week master recycling class will be offered at least once a year, according to Beckstead. A 2009 graduate of Scripps College in Claremont, Calif., she majored in environment, economic, and politics.

The course is funded by the Solid Waste Agency grant and has the support of SOS, Allied Waste, and SPARC. Based on other master recycler programs around Oregon, it is tailored specifically for Josephine County.

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To earn the title of master recycler, class participants complete 30 hours of classroom instruction and 30 hours of community service. The volunteer work can be educational outreach or actual recycling efforts performed at local community events such as the county fair.

Twenty Josephine County residents have already taken the Jackson County master recycling class.

“The great thing about participating in this course, as is evident in the success of the Jackson County Master Recycler program, is that it allows participants to give back to their community while gaining knowledge and having fun,” Beckstead added. “We will likely have participants of all ages and interests — retirees, business members, and students.”

RCC’s longer term vision for the recycling laboratory is to have a dedicated building on campus that will serve as a “green” educational center. The Green Team also plans to acquire a commercial grade composter and create a community garden. These resources would be available to faculty members who include green elements in their curriculum and to students for selected educational projects. The center also would provide outreach to the community and serve as a Josephine County demonstration site for recycling best practices.

For more information contact Britta Beckstead, AmeriCorps member and Recycling Program coordinator, 956-7185.

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