

GREEN ETHICS - Projects awaken environmental consciousness ~ Elise Doster Stolzle



Operating from a small office jam-packed with trash bags, stacks of paper and aluminum cans, recycling director Ben Taylor finds comfort in his surroundings—not for what these items represent physically, but for what they mean to the environment.

“We unfortunately live in a wasteful society, but on the bright side, more and more people are taking an interest in the environment,” Taylor said. “I don’t know if this is due to hurricanes, the economy, or fear of global warming, but something has made people take notice of the environmental problems we are facing.”

As recycling director, Taylor is making impressive headway with Southeastern’s recycling program during its first year in operation. He was charged with jumpstarting “green” initiatives at Southeastern.

With help from various academic departments, campus offices and student groups, Southeastern has collected over seven tons of recyclable waste in the past 10 months alone.

A former member of the board of the Lake Pontchartrain Basin Foundation and past editor of the environmentally-focused publication *Louisiana Levant Magazine*, Taylor has always had an interest in conservation.

“People have to develop their own personal ethic to prevent waste and save, and that’s why I do what I do,” Taylor said. “Southeastern can find a real purpose in recycling and preserving, and that’s what I’m trying to accomplish.”

With funding from the Student Government Association, recycling stations and approximately 120 designated recycling bins have been set up around campus to collect an array of items from aluminum cans to broken cell phones. Not surprisingly, paper is by far the most popular recycled item on campus.

“We filled our huge paper container twice in June,” he said. “I knew paper would give us a starting point, but now we are collecting Mardi Gras beads, ink cartridges and clothes hangers,

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~Ben Taylor
Recycling Director

along with the other items people regularly recycle.”

Curtis Hymel, a senior biology major from Norco and Taylor’s student worker, said he enjoys informing students and the community about the campus program.

“It’s not hard to recycle,” Hymel said. “We just have to make people aware of the program and get them involved. From that point, everyone seems to want to help.”

The program is not only helping the university reduce waste, but is also assisting other organizations through donations. After the 2009 Mardi Gras season, Southeastern collected more than 122 pounds of beads for Options, a non-profit organization that provides housing and assistance to disabled citizens. Options then resells the beads to support employees and fund future programs.

Taylor said the recycling program has also been partnering with local and national organizations like Hammond’s ROAR (Recycle Our Areas Resources) and Freecycle Network to recycle items that Southeastern is unable to reuse on campus. With over six million members worldwide, the Freecycle Network allows people to exchange items like batteries and CDs rather than placing them in a landfill.

In an effort to look beyond recycling, Taylor organized a campus group focused on developing additional sustainability efforts. The group, called the Sustainability Roundtable, consists of professors, students and others who possess an interest in preserving natural resources.

“The Sustainability Roundtable allows us to discuss things we can do to create a more environmentally-conscious university,” he said. “There are so many areas to explore like solar energy, and organic gardening, and I think the group serves as a great opportunity to bounce ideas off each other.”

At this time, Taylor said he is trying to promote the Adopt A Building campaign, where students, staff and faculty members volunteer to collect recyclables for a specific building. The goal is to have volunteers serve as ambassadors to get others interested in protecting the environment.

“We want to expand the program and make people aware of opportunities out there,” he said. “We have already done a lot, but I know we can do so much more. If every person and office on this campus made a promise to recycle just one thing, whether paper, newspapers or Coke cans, it would make a difference.”

Recycling Director Ben Taylor peers into one of the university’s collection centers for newspaper recycling.



Recycling by the numbers

Southeastern’s recycling project is off to a fast start. Since the beginning of the year, the following has been collected and recycled:

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| Aluminum cans | 80 lbs |
| Books | 28,900 lbs |
| White paper | 11,960 lbs |
| Plastic grocery bags | 29 lbs |
| Mardi Gras beads | 122 lbs |
| Small batteries | 440 lbs |
| Yellow Pages | 1,515 books |
| Toner cartridges | 102 |