



# The Jewel of Junk & Stuff

Julie Daniel  
of BRING  
talks about  
grassroots  
growing up.



Story by Bobbie Willis

These first true days of spring, the sun glints and shimmers through BRING Recycling Center so that every window pane and piece of broken glass sparkles like gemstone; so that every mishmash piece of sheet metal or metal tubing or metal frame, pipe or wire catches and throws back a little shine; so that every discarded ceramic sink and bathtub and toilet gleams softly, but so compellingly that something in you believes, no *insists*, it can all be resuscitated, brought back to life — that it can all be used again.

Julie Daniel, general manager and co-director of BRING tells me that this spark, this belief in resuscitation — or more specifically in the reuse part of reduce-reuse-recycle — is where the future is at for a grassroots, nonprofit recycling center such as BRING. “The world of recycling is changing,” she says. “And in a way, BRING is almost a victim of its own success.”

**F**or more than 30 years, BRING has worked to make recycling a community value here in Lane County. “And it *is* a core community value,” says Daniel. “Recycling is one of the things that defines us. We have incredible participation here and people are very loyal to the process.”

She explains, “When BRING started in 1971, we made recycling happen in the community. We introduced the concept and really built a market for a system that has now become part of the mainstream — what was started by activists and visionaries and environmentalists has become mainstream.”

And within the mainstream, recycling has grown up, become an industry. “So now,” says Daniel, “your garbage haulers — not a nonprofit — are who pick up your recyclables. Materials are sorted in big facilities that handle enormous streams of material.”

Don’t get Daniel wrong. “I don’t see that as being a bad thing, it’s just a fact. Garbage and waste commodities are *big* industry, big companies. It’s very capital intensive. You

need very expensive equipment — and a lot of it — and big facilities and all kinds of capital investments that very few nonprofits can muster. And why would we?” she asks matter-of-factly. “Why would we do something that the for-profit sector can do far cheaper and more efficiently than we can?”

But this brings into question the role of a local, grassroots recycling center such as BRING. The organization is an anomaly, Daniel explains. “Recycling was started by nonprofits, and by and large those nonprofits have gone out of business. There are only a handful — BRING among them — left in the country today.” To maintain its survival, BRING will make some major organizational shifts, including even more emphasis on education, and relocating the center to a significantly larger site in Glenwood.

## Roots to Reinvention

About five years ago, when Daniel moved from an office position with BRING to take on the role of co-director with Business

Manager David Wollner, the facility was starting to feel the for-profit squeeze-out in recycling. She says, “I think that when David and I put our heads together and started looking at the organization, we realized that recycling would not be in our future forever. We can’t really compete as processors or collectors of materials. We just don’t have the capacity, and there really isn’t the volume of materials in this town.”

This organizational examination led the directors right back to BRING’s mission statement: to promote “a healthy, sustainable environment through education, innovative waste reduction, reuse and recycling programs and by involving the community in resource conservation.”

And it suddenly became clear that there was a direction in which a nonprofit recycler could grow. Says Daniel, “BRING from the very beginning was a little different from other nonprofit recyclers in that we did more than just recycle. We’ve always had an educational component. Back in 1974, before environmental education was even a twinkle in

the eye of government, BRING had an environmental educator.”

And so BRING has decided to focus more intently upon education. If grassroots could make recycling mainstream, could education make reuse and reduction mainstream, as well?

## More Radical Change

While BRING heartily endorses recycling as not only a core community value, but also as a true step toward conserving resources, Daniel still admits: “It’s not enough.”

Daniel and Wollner had taken a hard look at the statistical information on recycling provided by the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ). “They keep very detailed statistics,” Daniel explains. “And that’s where you come up with a thing called the recovery rate,” or the percentage of materials recovered and recycled.

“What we noticed,” Daniel says with some shock, “was that the recovery rate was climbing higher and higher and higher. We went from 20, 30, 40, into the low 50s — an