

Cleaning Up the Dirty Dishes

Rising Moon Organics does it the green way.

BY MELISSA BEARNS

It's not easy to be the first, the trend setter, the person with the impossible vision. "There was a lot of skepticism," said Kirk Giudici, co-owner of Rising Moon Organics. "A few people told me I was crazy to even try."

"You know how it is when you're the first guy out," said Food Committee member Sue Kesey. "Everyone thinks you're crazy."

But Giudici went ahead with his crazy plan: He used plastic dishes to serve food to thousands of people at the Oregon Country Fair, then washed them in the middle of nowhere, with no running water, no electricity and no sewer system. "After the first year, I was just horrified," he said, relaxing in Rising Moon's business office, a few rooms in a house right in downtown Eugene with tangerine orange walls and buckets earmarked for the fair stacked floor to ceiling. "I said we have to do something different, we have to do our part."

Getting the plastic plates was the hardest piece of the project. The kind they use at the Rising Moon booth costs about \$4.50 new.

The first year they did it, some members of OCF's food committee reprimanded Giudici during the fair. But at that point the system was already up and running. After seven days of serving handmade ravioli, organic salads and zippy drinks, the Rising Moon Organics crew had proved the skeptics wrong: Washing dishes on site at the OCF was possible. Now, 13 years later, dishwashing is just the way they do it at the Rising Moon booth.

Giudici and his crew did more than prove the naysayers wrong. He raised the bar for the entire fair when it comes to reducing waste. "His impact has been enormous," said Lara Howe, recycling crew coordinator for the OCF and OCF board member. "They were definitely pioneers of the re-using concept. Where recycling used to be so popular, now it's shifting to the reducing and re-using. And they understood that a long time ago."

Over the last five years, fair organizers such as Howe have been pushing hard to reduce the amount of waste the fair generates. In 2000 they hauled about 33 tons of trash to the landfill. By last year, they had cut

Those products are still under development, and the cups made from the same materials work great. Instead, this year, they're using metal cutlery in a pilot project. Next year, Howe said she expects they'll make reusable silverware mandatory. Some booths, such as Dana's Cheesecake and Nancy's Yogurt, have been using bio-degradable and reusable cutlery for years.

But back to dirty dishes. Right now, even if they wanted to, the fair couldn't switch every booth over to a system like the one Rising Moon is using because the sensitive wetlands where the fair is held couldn't handle all that gray water — the dirty water that normally goes down the sink. "Kirk is one of 70 food booths," explained Kesey. "If every booth that used plates decided they were going to use enough water to wash the plates, well, you can multiply that by 70."

Howe hopes that one day they'll find a way to put in dishwashing stations at every booth. "I can see it being a fair project in the near future to eliminate the use of all those paper products that are currently going into our compost," she said. "It's a whole lot of trees when you think about it."

In the meantime, Giudici and his crew continue to do their thing. Washing dishes. Inventing bizarre contraptions like a gigantic, pedal-powered salad spinner. And most importantly, having fun and serving great, organic food.

"He was one of those people who ignited this dream in all of us," Howe added. "One of those really cool people. The people who are walking their talk."

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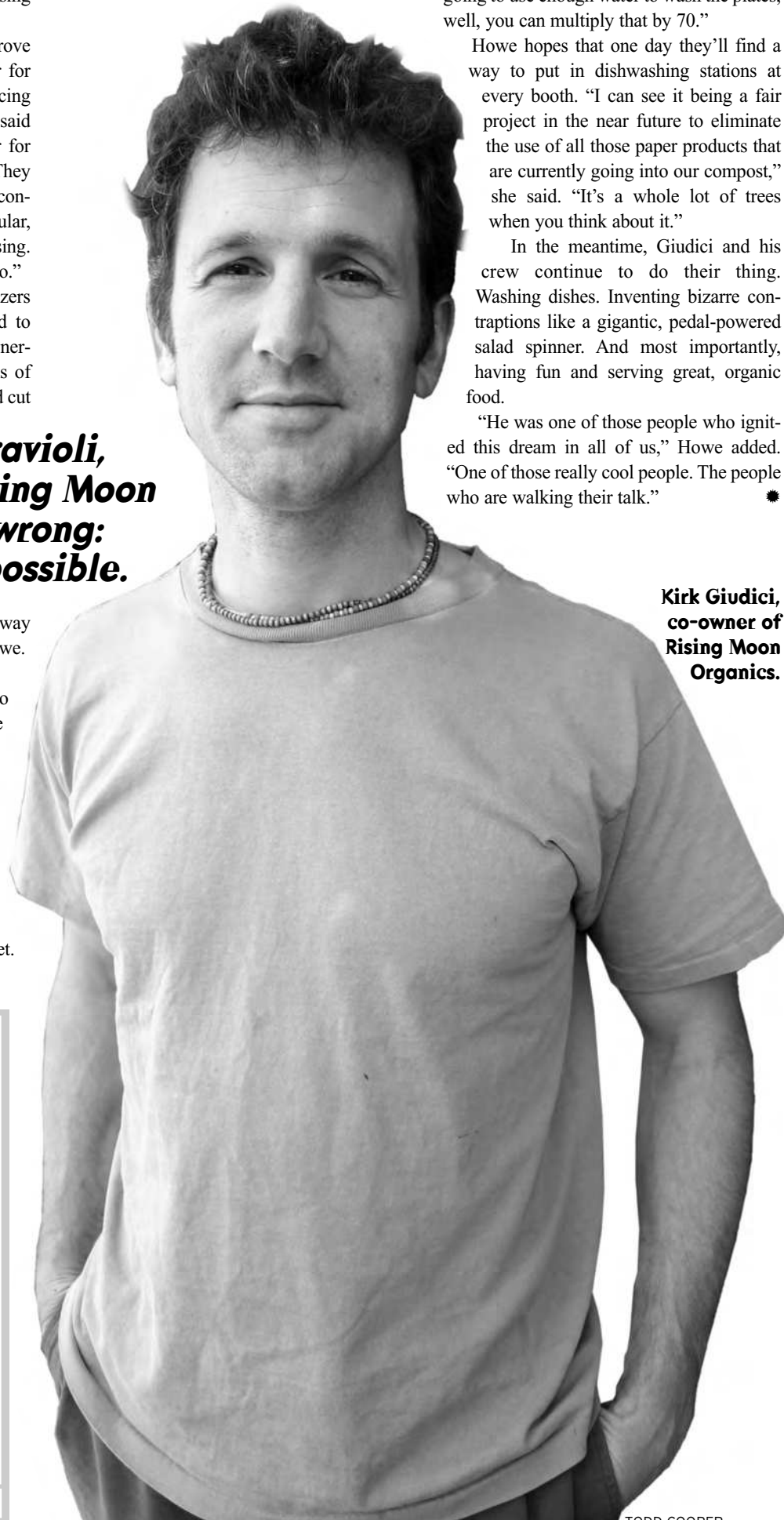
Used restaurant supply stores were little help until an employee told Giudici about an auction a year back where they'd sold hundreds of the plates. "It was a telephone treasure hunt," Giudici said. "But I finally tracked down the guy who'd bought them. He had them out in his barn and sold them to me for 20 cents a plate."

Then they built a big water tank above their booth and installed heaters for the water. An eight-step washing system for the dishes allowed them to use less water and cut down on the amount of gray water they were creating.

that number almost in half, throwing away 16.9 tons of trash. "It's not bad," said Howe. "But we can do better."

Some of the changes they've made to reduce waste include composting all the paper plates and cups and using bio-degradable products made from corn. The first year they tried bio-degradable utensils, it was a disappointment. The spoons bent in hot liquids. And a year after they'd been discarded, they were still intact amidst the decaying tomatoes and watermelon rinds.

But Howe hasn't given up on them yet.



Kirk Giudici,
co-owner of
Rising Moon
Organics.



Pedal-powered salad spinner and dish-washing the old fashioned way.

TODD COOPER