



Dave Kafis



Jeremiah Trygslund, SCF crew

# SOLDIERS OF WASTE

**Composting our food scraps across the city** STORY BY DEANNA UUTELA • PHOTOS BY TODD COOPER

**T**hey answer to “Mr. Worm,” “Composting Queen” and “Recycle Bin.” They would gladly spend hours talking to you about the digestion and mating patterns of a red worm. If you invite them over, you might catch them digging through your garbage for excess coffee grounds or kitchen waste.

They are the soldiers of compost: the few, the proud, the truly organic. They wear their soiled shirts like a badge of honor. Whether they work for the city, a business, a program or just on their own, these men and women are dedicated to diminishing the landfills and cleaning up the streams, one bin at a time.

Anne Donahue has worked as a compost specialist for the city of Eugene for seven years. She has witnessed an increase in the landfill mass with each passing year and has contributed to the research done to determine how much food waste goes into our streams and how much is dumped into the landfills. The research has concluded that more than one-third of the waste generated in Eugene is organic matter. Food, paper and wood waste are the top three components in the landfill: Yard debris makes up 5.5 percent, food waste 13.6 percent and wood 15.1 percent.

“Most people don’t realize that landfills have a life capacity, and once they are full a new site has to be found, and that is not as easy as you think it is,” says Donahue. Lane County Waste Reduction Specialist Sarah Grimm anticipates Lane County’s landfill being at capacity around the year 2087, but she adds that the life expectancy could be extended if we try harder to control our waste in the present. “Last year the landfill took in over 262,000 tons of trash,” Grimm says. “For me the issue is less about capacity and more about making the best use of the items coming into the landfill. That means more recycling of everyday products — and composting of agricultural products.”

Without a citywide food waste composting program, the Eugene Waste Management team has had to rely heavily on grants and individual efforts to decrease the waste prob-

Jan Vandertuin



Sarah Grimm (right) and volunteer set up compost bins



Anne Donahue