

Dirt Hugger settles in at Dallesport

By AMBER MARRA
The Enterprise

After four years in The Dalles, Dirt Hugger, LLC is finally establishing itself.

Earlier this year, the commercial composting company announced that it entered into a 30-year lease with the Port of Klickitat for nine acres at the Dallesport Industrial Park off US 197 near Tidyman Road.

The move comes four years after Dirt Hugger originally got on its feet in The Dalles where it sold more than 10,000 yards of compost. Pierce Louis, co-owner of Dirt Hugger, said that gave his company time to develop and refine its processes before investing the \$500,000 that it will take to finish its new location.

"After four years of making mistakes and learning from those mistakes we're able to design from the ground up and we feel really fortunate to have that chance because not many composters have that opportunity," Louis said.

To make its move, Dirt Hugger borrowed money, used four grants, and launched a successful Kickstarter campaign.

A grant obtained by the Port of Klickitat through USDA Rural Development came to \$50,000 and other grants through Klickitat County came to \$35,000 to help pay for power, water, and infrastructure that would provide pollution control.

Then there is the Kickstarter. As of July 3, Dirt Hugger's Kickstarter campaign surpassed its \$65,000 goal with 276 backers raising \$66,579.

"That's amazing. That is what made this possible entirely. We needed to be out of that site by Nov. 1 and had to start construction here and we didn't have our loan in place yet, so literally that Kickstarter money is what carried us through because we were in deep financially with construction before we got our loan," Louis said. "There's five of us wandering around in the dirt all day, but it's totally community backed."

As of December, Louis said the Dallesport facility was 60 percent done with a comple-



Amber Marra photo

PIERCE LOUIS, co-owner of Dirt Hugger, stands next to one of the many piles of compost at the company's new facility in Dallesport. Dirt Hugger signed a lease with the Port of Klickitat earlier this year and made the move after four years at its previous facility in The Dalles.

tion date set for spring of 2015.

Under its current, partially finished circumstances, Dirt Hugger is composting "the old school way," as Louis would say, but all that really means is that they're operating the same way they were when they were located in The Dalles.

Once completed, Dirt Hugger will be able to make higher quality compost faster, with some processes being cut from 90 days to just 45. Much of that is due to the enormous aeration pad that will be installed as soon as the weather allows for the pouring of concrete.

In Louis's words, the enhanced aeration is "a giant air hockey pad, essentially" that will optimize the environment for the microbial populations needed to create compost.

"With this aeration pad, the first seven-to-14 days the microbes demand the most oxygen, especially if you take in a lot of fruit like we do. The cell walls of the fruit break down in about three days, so there's a big oxygen demand and if you can supply that air when you really want it then they'll be really efficient about

breaking the pile down," Louis said.

The aeration pad will also allow for better temperature control and will allow piles of compost to be moved in just 12 minutes, whereas before it could take up to two hours.

"Our old style was something called thermophilic, which is a higher heat process at 165 degrees, which is required and we still need for the pathogen reduction phase to basically kill off anything like salmonella that could come in with the food. If you can then get the temperature back down to 120 degrees the mesophilic microbes will be four times more efficient, so that's how we're getting our process down from 90 days to 45 days," Louis said.

Now that Dirt Hugger will have an increased ability to make compost, the company is hoping that haulers and city councils around the Gorge will work together to establish curbside food scrap and compost pick-up programs.

Louis said he approached trash haulers in multiple communities about the opportunity to establish such a pro-

gram, but no one wanted to take him up on it at the time. The City of White Salmon gave Dirt Hugger the go-ahead to start picking up compost last year, but that only lasted two months before the company ran into complications with licensing and permits.

"It's up to the community to demand it of their council. We've done our part by creating the infrastructure and the capacity to handle it, but I can't go to a city council and make them have composting," Louis said.

Once the new facility is finished this spring, Louis said he and Dirt Hugger's other five employees plan on revisiting city councils to try to get more curbside composting programs going, but during the hectic transitional period, there just was no time.

"There was a lot of pain associated with moving, emotionally, financially, but now that we're here this is a much better location, the layout is much better, and it's a really healthy, positive move for us. We feel like we're finally sort of establishing ourselves," Louis said.



Photo by Diana Beterbide

FREEZE FRAMES

Multnomah Falls and Benson Bridge, Dec. 31. Send your Freeze Frame images (1MB, provide brief details) to hnews@hoodrivernews.com.

CGCC seeks applicants to serve on budget committee

The Columbia Gorge Community College Board of Education seeks interested district electors in Wasco and Hood River County for consideration to be appointed to a three-year term as a Budget Committee member.

Interested persons shall send a letter of interest with qualifications, telephone and address to Tiffany Prince, Columbia Gorge Community

College, 400 East Scenic Dr., The Dalles, OR 97058.

Deadline for consideration is Jan. 31. Columbia Gorge Community College is an equal opportunity educator and employer, and its district includes all of Wasco and Hood River Counties (with the exception of Cascade Locks, which is included in the Mt. Hood Community College District).

OLCC survey seeks input over legality of marijuana

The Oregon Liquor Control Commission has launched an online community survey at marijuana.oregon.gov asking Oregonians to share their hopes and concerns about the coming legal market for recreational marijuana. The survey, which is open through Monday, Jan. 12, will help the agency plan a statewide listening tour to be announced later this month.

"We need to hear from Oregonians across the state as we implement the law," said OLCC Chairman Rob Patridge. "We need to hear from community members, parents, law enforcement, people who want to grow or sell recreational marijuana,

and local governments. We want to know your priorities. What should marijuana regulation look like in your community?" Patridge said the survey and listening tour are the first steps in a yearlong rulemaking process that will include monthly Commission meetings, rules advisory committee meetings and other opportunities to hear from the public.

Under the new law, possession of recreational marijuana becomes legal on July 1 of this year. The OLCC must begin accepting applications for commercial licenses next January, with retail stores to open by late 2016.

Author looks for stories of fire lookouts in Oregon

Portland author Cheryl Hill has been gathering historic photos from the Forest Service and the Oregon Department of Forestry for the past year and is now looking for stories to go along with the photos.

Although stories from recent lookouts are welcome, Hill is especially interested in lookout stories from the 1930s, '40s, and '50s, even if the stories are second-hand.

"Many of the men and women who worked at lookouts back then have already passed away," Hill said.

"I'm hoping that some of their memories were passed down to their children."

To share your lookout story, visit www.oregon-lookouts.com.

This will be Hill's second book. Her first book, "Mount Hood National Forest," was released last March.

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| | | | 2 | 9 | 1 |
| 6 | | | | | 2 |
| | 4 | 2 | 5 | | |
| 9 | 3 | 1 | | 5 | 7 |
| | | 5 | 9 | 4 | 8 |
| 4 | | | 6 | | 2 |


Fill in all 81 squares on the puzzle with numbers 1 to 9. You can use each number 1-9 only once in each nine square section, in each horizontal line of nine squares, and in each vertical column of nine squares. The puzzle is completed when you correctly fill every square.

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