

Hermiston employer recognized by Department of Defense

By JADE MCDOWELL
NEWS EDITOR

In the year since Sidney Nevil started working for Vern's Food Service Distribution in Hermiston, he has frequently needed time off of work to attend to his duties in the National Guard.

His boss, Fred Ledezma, has always been understanding.

"Sometimes it's been last minute, and without question, he says, 'I'll see you when you get back,'" Nevil said.

It's something Nevil has been grateful for. Flexible and supportive employers like Ledezma, he said, greatly relieve stress for Guard members as they try to juggle their employment and their duty to their country.

On Wednesday, Ledezma was recognized with the Seven Seals award from



Staff photo by Ben Lonergan

Jerry Carlson, left, Fred Ledezma, and Sidney Nevil pose for a picture outside of Vern's Food Service Distribution in Hermiston on Wednesday afternoon. Ledezma was recognized with an award from the Department of Defense for his support of employees in the National Guard following a nomination for the award by Nevil.

the Department of Defense, after Nevil nominated him for consideration.

The award is characterized as the "broadest and most inclusive award"

given by the department's Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve pro-

gram. The ESGR was established in 1972 to foster more support of reserves by their civilian employers, and to help service members and their employers navigate difficulties caused by their military commitments.

Jerry Carlson, an ESGR military outreach coordinator in Hermiston, said National Guard members have more trainings, deployments and other demands on their time than they used to — making it more important than ever that employers be willing to hire and support soldiers.

"Some employers are not very supportive," he said during an informal presentation ceremony Wednesday afternoon.

He said that Vern's Food Service Distribution and Ledezma would be held up as a "prime example" of support.

Ledezma has worked for

the company for 27 years, and serves as its warehouse manager and driver manager. The company distributes wholesale food, beverages and supplies throughout Oregon and Washington, according to its website.

Ledezma said he believes it is important to hire people currently serving in the National Guard and veterans, to gain from their experience and give them new skills and experience in return. It's something he has tried to do throughout his career there.

"I believe they have a lot to contribute," he said.

He said he was honored to receive the award recognizing his support of the ESGR's mission.

"When they were explaining to me, I thought it was beautiful," he said. "It's nice to be recognized in the community."

Drop in market means recyclables land in landfill

By JADE MCDOWELL
NEWS EDITOR

Your most recently discarded shampoo bottle may technically be able to be recycled, but it's not going to be.

Pop bottles and other drink containers you can redeem for a 10-cent deposit in Oregon are still being recycled by the Oregon Beverage Recycling Cooperative at a facility in St. Helens that handles high-quality #1 plastics. And some transfer stations, such as Sanitary Disposal in Hermiston, are currently taking milk jugs.

"All other plastics are just landfilled," Sanitary Disposal president Mike Jewett said. "DEQ said get rid of them."

It wasn't always this way. For decades, Americans tossed everything from laundry detergent bottles to butter tubs into curbside bins, assuring themselves that the items would be reshaped into a new container and land back on the shelves at Walmart shortly.

Those low-quality plastics are expensive and difficult to recycle, however, and break down over multiple rounds of recycling. Companies in the United States couldn't make recycling such products pencil out financially, and so they shipped most of that plastic to China.

That's not all they were shipping to China. Careless Americans were increasingly throwing jars half-full of peanut butter, syringes and Styrofoam containers into the mix, increasing labor costs and decreasing profits as workers had to separate out the waste that made up as much as 20% of the load the company had paid for.

And so, in July 2017, China announced it would no longer be allowing imports of most plastic waste, and transfer stations suddenly found themselves with nowhere to sell their plastic for recycling.

Some, like Milton-Free-water's recycling contractor Horizon Project, quickly announced they would stop taking plastic. Others, like transfer stations in The Dalles and Hood River, kept collecting curbside recycling



Staff photo by Ben Lonergan

A wall of stacked bales of cardboard support a pile of newsprint at Sanitary Disposal in Hermiston on Friday afternoon. The newsprint is left in a pile while the company works to mend their baler so that they can process and bale the paper to get sold for reclamation.

cling to keep people in the habit but then took out the plastic and sent it to landfills or incinerators.

At Sanitary Disposal, Jewett told the *East Oregonian* in November 2017 that they were still stockpiling plastic on site, hoping to ride out the sudden glut in the very small domestic market.

Two years later, a new home for most of that plastic has never materialized, domestically or in other countries.

Now, Jewett said, a similar problem is forming with cardboard. He said China was taking 20 million tons of cardboard a few years ago, then five million, and now two. The county expects to not accept any by 2021.

"That market has really gone sour," Jewett said.

Sanitary Disposal is stockpiling cardboard like it once stockpiled plastic, hoping the market will rebound in the spring after going "as low as it's ever been."

Jewett said the transfer station is still recycling other materials, such as wood, metals and glass. Right now it's costing them more to ship the glass to Portland than they're getting paid for it, he said, but "we don't want to break any habits."

"Our recycling income is a lot lower than it has been in the past," he said.

A report on recycling released this week by the environmental advocacy organization Environment Oregon stated that Oregonians are producing more waste than ever while recycling less of it.

"The reality is plastics are so hard to recycle and so low value that we could only consistently afford to collect and recycle it when China was willing to buy it," Celeste Meiffren-Swango, state director for Environment Oregon Research & Policy Center, said in a statement. "Now we are left to deal with it ourselves, and plastic is choking our recycling system."

The report points out the problems that come with reduced recycling. Burning more plastic in incinerators damages air quality and presents health hazards. More plastic ends up in the ocean. Landfills can leak toxins into the soil or water supply, and generate greenhouse gases. And finally, when materials are discarded instead of recycled,

it creates a need to obtain new "virgin" materials, accelerating our consumption of the Earth's resources.

In order to address the problem, Environment Oregon suggests a three-pronged approach: Reduce, Reuse and Recycle.

Under reduce, they support laws banning or reducing single-use products, such as plastic bags, straws and styrofoam take-out containers. They also support structuring garbage rates based on how much waste a person throws out, encouraging conservation.

Under reuse, they encourage consumers and businesses to trade single-use plastics for products, such as fabric grocery bags or refillable water bottles. They also advocate for "right to repair" laws that allow people and independent shops to fix their own appliances and other products.

Under recycle, they suggest an expansion of curbside recycling and composting programs, as well as laws requiring new products to contain a certain percentage of recycled material.



Staff photo by Ben Lonergan

Milk jugs pile up in crates below a sign advising visitors to Sanitary Disposal in Hermiston on Friday afternoon that other forms of plastic are no longer accepted as recycling.

They want to legally hold manufacturers accountable for "the waste their product will become."

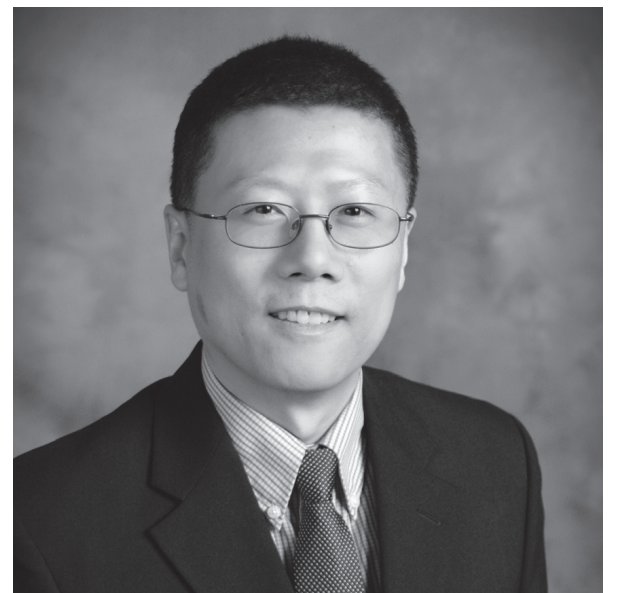
"It's entirely within our power to fix the system, but what is missing is the necessary sense of urgency," U.S. PIRG Education Fund Zero Waste Director Alex Truelove, who co-authored the report, said in a news release. "Recycling, composting and waste reduction efforts will need to play an important role in the fight against microplastic pollution, climate change and other environmental challenges."

From a transfer station's standpoint, Jewett said indi-

vidual customers can do their part by being careful to follow rules posted at sites where they get rid of their recycling. The glass drop-offs are only for glass bottles and food containers, for example. If someone throws a window into the dumpster and it breaks, they have now rendered the entire load of glass unfit for recycling, out of concerns about lead contamination.

Contamination by careless recyclers, of course, is what lead to China throwing the recycling market into chaos in the first place.

"Remember: Contamination turns recycling into trash," Jewett said.



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DO, Family Medicine

Kan Yang earned his degree of Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine from Michigan State University College of Osteopathic Medicine, DMC Campus, in Detroit, Michigan. He completed his residency with The Wright Center for GME, Family Medicine Regional Network, in Scranton, Pennsylvania. In his spare time, Kan enjoys reading science fiction, spending time with family, jogging, and playing squash, basketball, ping pong, and tennis.

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