

Ridge Meadows Recycling Society: 40 years

By Linda Wegner *Writer*

MAPLE RIDGE - The heritage created by early recyclers, including **Dave** and **Julie Koehn**, reads like a history book of environmental sustainability breakthroughs in the Province of British Columbia.

From the seed planted when a volunteer visited Victoria's first Earth Day in 1970 till today when manufacturers are being held increasingly responsible for the recycling of their products, **Ridge Meadows Recycling Society (RMRS)** has been a leader in BC's Lower Mainland communities of Maple Ridge and Pitt Meadows.

"In 1970 one of our volunteers, **Bob Cordoni**, went to the first Earth Day and came back with the new idea of recycling. We partnered with the **District of Maple Ridge** to set up a collection depot on the side of the dump," **Leanne Koehn**, daughter of Dave and Julie and Head of Communications for RMRS tells Business Fraser Valley.

Fueled with excitement over this new idea of recycling, Cordoni and other **Society for the Promotion of Environmental Conservation (SPEC)** members decided to put their enthusiasm into action. RMRS became an official, separate society a couple years later. It was a modest beginning, the collection of newspaper, glass and tin cans in a shed located in the Koehns' backyard; who knows if they envisioned how their investment in the planet's sustain-



Ridge Meadows Recycling Society truck, above, and recycling depot building, below



ability would grow to what it is today.

From the very beginning, however, recycling became a partnership between local SPEC members, residents, and the District of Maple Ridge: members provided volunteer workers, residents sorted their recyclables and aided in community education programs. In 1974 the District co-operated in donating space at the **Cottonwood Landfill** to set up the first **Maple Ridge Recycling Depot**.

Since its inception forty years ago, Ridge Meadows Recycling Society has grown from a fledgling organization with a vision of what the environmental future might look like, to a bustling business.

The non-profit society now employs approximately sixty individuals, including close to three dozen people with developmental disabilities [*word removed] working through the Supported Work Program in partnership with **Community Living British Columbia**.

The number of people working for Ridge Meadows Recycling has grown and so has the number and variety of recyclable materials that can be dropped off at the facility.

"We now accept over two hundred different items and we try to take part in as many stewardship programs as possible. The Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) program is moving responsibility for "end

of life" away from governments and municipalities and back to the manufacturers and retailers. That started with bottle returns and BC is a front runner in this," Leanne explains.

Looking back there is much to celebrate: individuals and businesses have made great strides in cleaning up the environment; the concepts of reduce, reuse and recycle has become a familiar slogan and Ridge Meadows Recycling Society continues to thrive and expand. It only makes sense, then, to mark a major accomplishment with a party and a contest.

"On Earth Day we had a big party to celebrate our forty years in business and we're currently running a contest to

name forty individuals under the age of forty who are future up-and-coming environmental leaders. Last year we named a four-year-old recycling fan as our "Recycler of the Year" and working with him inspired this contest. We're partnering with the *Maple Ridge Times* on this. People can submit nominations on our website until September 30," Leanne says.

According to Koehn, one thing their fortieth anniversary celebrates is the fact that Maple Ridge has a very different approach to recycling. Because RMRS a non-profit society and decisions are made by a board comprised of passionate volunteers who are environmentally active, its motives for being in business are earth-friendly.

"Besides blue box pickup and processing at the depot, education is a lot of what we do. We offer recycling depot tours and educational workshops within the School District. We visit schools and give workshops on [topics such as] composting, recycling and water conservation."

RMRS recently won the 2011 *Business Excellence Award* for Community Service from the **Maple Ridge-Pitt Meadows Chamber of Commerce**. One of the services they provide offers weekly, bi-weekly, or monthly commercial recycling pickup services.

"A lot of businesses have budgets for garbage disposal so this is a viable option for them as well as being the right thing to do."

Support and partnership for Ridge Meadows Recycling Society programs is provided by The District of Maple Ridge, Community Living BC, The Province of British Columbia/Community Gaming Grants, **ABC Recycling** (Burnaby, BC), **Bulldog Bags**, **Carpet One Floor & Home Cares**, **Maple Ridge Community Foundation**, **Merlin Plastics**, **Spectra Energy** and **Westminster Savings** (Maple Ridge)

Ridge Meadows Recycling Society is at 10092 - 236th Street in Maple Ridge.

www.rmrecycling.org

M&R Environmental would like to take the opportunity to congratulate Ridge Meadows Recycling on your successful 40 years of business.



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