

# Recycling Roundup expands pickup service

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Methow Valley residents and visitors may notice big blue bins appearing at various businesses around the valley. They are Blue Bag drop locations, part of a new recycling program launched by Recycling Roundup.

Recycling Roundup is a business started last year by valley residents Casey Bouchard and Joseph Weaver. The company collects recyclable items and hauls them to Methow Recycles, the valley recycling center.

The business has grown steadily over the past year, providing recycling pickup and delivery for businesses, residential developments, special events and individual customers, said Bouchard. But Betsy Cushman, executive director of Methow Recycles, saw a missing piece in the valley's recycling puzzle – finding an easy way for valley visitors to recycle while they are here.

Cushman wanted the recycling to come to the recycling center, rather than get thrown out or taken home with the visitors. "It was a need I've seen from the beginning," Cushman said. So, when Bouchard was starting up his new recycling collection business, she urged him to come up with a plan to make it easy for visitors to recycle.

"Betsy challenged me to try to capture the transient recycling that comes into the valley with visitors, part-timers, campers," said Bouchard. "She planted the seed.... It took a while for that to take root and for me to figure out how to do it."

Bouchard said he developed a concept based on recycling programs offered at boating marinas, and in Europe.



The result is Recycling Roundup's "Blue Bag" recycling service, which Bouchard and Weaver launched last summer as a pilot project. The program picked up steam over the holidays and is growing.

The idea is simple. People buy a blue bag – a tall kitchen-sized plastic bag – for \$5 at locations around the valley. They put all their recyclable products – glass, cans, plastic, paper and cardboard – together in the bag, and drop it off at one of the drop bins located throughout the valley. Sorting and delivery is left to Recycling Roundup.

Bouchard started offering the service at the beginning of last summer at Rivers Edge Resort in Winthrop and the Mazama Country Inn. Guests were given the opportunity to buy a blue bag at check-in, and return them at checkout. Many visitors chose the convenience of buying the bags. As summer went on, the blue bag business was catching on.

Then, Bouchard had a realization.

"It dawned on me one day that we have an opportunity to have a retail recycling product, something we can sell through retail partners and make available not just to visitors and campers, but also to residents who are tired of sorting. In recycling, it's the single-stream solution," Bouchard said.

Last fall, Bouchard began setting up partnerships with businesses strategically located around the valley. The business partners sell the bags and provide space outside for the Blue Bag drop bins.

Meg and Dan Donohue of Blue Star Coffee Roasters in Twisp agreed immediately to help Bouchard kick off the program when Bouchard asked them to participate.

"Because we do so much recycling, we're really a big proponent of it," Meg Donohue said. Blue Star was already a customer of Recycling Roundup's onsite recycling collection, and Donohue said they were happy to offer the Blue Bag service. "We sell the bags direct to customers at \$5 apiece. They take them and drop them off at the Blue Bag drop-off bin outside. They can drop them off at any one of them."

The Donohues have become Blue Bag customers themselves. By smashing and compacting the recyclables, she and her husband fill a bag once every two weeks, Donohue said.

"The bags started selling like crazy over the holidays," Bouchard said. "It was really exciting that... we had come up with something that had proven to be useful to people. I was running around, picking up bags, sorting." Bouchard estimated he collected 50 to 60 bags during the last couple of weeks of December.

To make it easy for people to buy and drop off the bags, Bouchard has developed business partners up and down the valley. They include the Mazama Country Inn and Mazama Store in the north, Methow Cycle and Sport in Winthrop, Hank's Harvest Foods and Blue Star in Twisp. He's hoping to get a partner in the lower valley to serve that area.

The Blue Bag concept of recycling holds appeal for people who are tired of sorting their recycling, or are too busy to get to the recycling center and "are making a huge mess in their garage," Bouchard said. "For \$5 or \$10 you've got recycling you don't have to sort," Bouchard said.

Blue Bag customers are encouraged to smash and flatten cans, plastic and cardboard boxes to get as much into the bags as possible. Bouchard acknowledged that large families might not find it as economical as couples or singles. "For a family of five a blue bag is not a very good option because you're going to fill it up with milk jugs the first week."

Bouchard picks up the bags, about five a day currently, on regular rounds. The \$5 charge per bag covers transportation to the recycling center, labor involved in pickup and sorting, and a portion to the recycling center to cover processing.

"It's a volume game. The holiday hit and the potential became obvious," he said.

In addition to continuing their onsite recycling and Blue Bag service, Bouchard and Weaver are working with TwispWorks and the Seattle University Albers School of Business to develop an organic waste recycling program for the Methow Valley. The vision is to collect various types of green waste – food scraps, yard waste, manure, woody debris, agricultural byproducts, compostable containers – and create a line of quality soil amendments.

Bouchard and Weaver worked in Seattle before coming to the Methow Valley and starting Recycling Roundup. Bouchard says they are glad to have left behind desk jobs for their current work.

While sorting recycling into the array of bins in the trailer, Bouchard said he gets gratification from making order out of chaos. "I'm well suited to this work," he said.

"This is such a dream. To be able to live here, do something useful for the community, and make a living here."

**Photo by Ann McCreary: Joseph Weaver and Casey Bouchard gather blue bags at the collection point at Methow Cycle and Sport this week.**