

...In the last forty years recycling has become a central part of the environmental movement, and the entry level act of a sustainable lifestyle. Portland's recycling efforts can be traced back to the fall of 1970 when Jerry Powell, a student, started a recycling center on the Portland State University campus called the Portland Recycling Team (PRT). In 1974, Scott Burgwin and Doug Longhurst, who were also involved in the experimental community, Terrasquirma, set up a PRT recycling outpost in southeast Portland. To Burgwin and Longhurst, recycling epitomized the Quaker-inspired philosophy of the Terrasquirma community. As Alexander Patterson (2002) notes, "to global ecological problems, it offered a local, community-based, worker controlled solution. By emphasizing conservation and thrift, recycling even recalled Quaker simplicity (p. 178)."

Recognizing that to obtain a sound level of recycling at the household level, it would be critical to overcome the costs of collection and separation, Burgwin and Longhurst developed a household collection service that customers could subscribe to if they were willing to separate their waste at its source, that is the household. The Portland Recycling Team did not agree with their direction, so in 1974 Burgwin and Longhurst created their own recycling service, the Sunflower Recycling Collective. They faced multiple problems in establishing their business. They thought their mission was as much about educating people about the global ecological crisis as running a business. "To Burgwin," As Patterson (2002) notes, "the nonviolent revolution would be brought about by building collective, egalitarian institutions that would help the local community recognize its own capacity to change the world (p. 179)."

Egalitarian entrepreneurs like Burgwin and Longhurst also faced an uphill battle in starting a new industry with little business experience or capital. Then in 1975, Richard Duncan, a professor of systems science at Portland State University helped the group establish a business plan. Duncan was driven by some of the same ideological challenges that inspired Sunflower, and he proposed what he called the Ore Plan. While this plan did not provide a magic solution to the problems of business practices or capitalization it did provide a rational method for assessing costs, monitoring and documenting outcomes of experimental methods for source separation and collection, and widely disseminating the Sunflower or Ore Plan model. Duncan published articles about the plan, attracting media attention and endorsements from Oregon Governor Tom McCall and U.S. Senator Mark Hatfield.

Meanwhile recycling efforts in Portland grew by leaps and bounds. Another program, Cloudburst Recycling, was created in northeast Portland, and in 1972 the Oregon Environmental Council (OEC) established the Recycling Switchboard to help Portlanders find the best way to recycle all manner of materials. In 1973 the Switchboard was taken over by the Oregon's Department of Environmental Quality, and it is still in operation today, operated by the regional government agency, Metro. In 1982 Roger Van Gelder, one of Sunflower's early volunteers, noted that traditional waste haulers had begun accepting recyclables to keep customers from switching to Sunflower or Cloudburst. "The effect of Sunflower really can't be underestimated," said Van Gelder "Since we've been recycling and competing with garbage haulers, they've started doing recycling, too (Collette, 1981, p. 69)." The early innovators were idealists, wanting more to create positive changes than make money.

While Cloudburst, Sunflower and PRT all still exist, the companies have not grown in proportion to the magnitude of the current marketplace of recycling. Still these entrepreneurs did manage to change Portlander's attitude toward waste.

- Steven Reed Johnson, Ph.D.

Source: [http://stevenreedjohnson.com/stevenreedjohnson/civicpdxEnriro\\_files/](http://stevenreedjohnson.com/stevenreedjohnson/civicpdxEnriro_files/)