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Kent County Celebrates 25 Years of Recycling

Grand Rapids – More than 300,000 tons of recyclable material have passed through the doors at the Kent County Recycling Center in the last 25 years. This totals 300,000 tons of plastic, metal, glass and paper that was returned to the economy as automobile parts, office furniture, building materials, household goods, clothing or many more useful products.

Since 1990, Kent County Department of Public Works (DPW) has accepted, processed and sold residential recyclables into the global marketplace. Working in conjunction with private and municipal waste haulers, the DPW accepts plastic bottles, metal cans, glass jars and paper products from homes in and around Kent County to be sorted at the Kent County Recycling & Education Center. Using a combination of manual sorting and first-class technology, the single-stream mixed recyclables are separated into commodity, baled and sold. Kent County owns and operates the facility, just one of eleven in Michigan and 571 nationally.

“Working with local brokers we process valuable commodities and bring them to market. The Kent County Recycling & Education Center provides jobs that support families, enables job training in partnership with Goodwill Industries to give a hand up and generates real economic value to West Michigan in partnership with our haulers, brokers and buyers,” said Darwin Baas, DPW Director.

“Kent County residents were early adopters of recycling and continue to demonstrate understanding and support for diverting discarded material as a feedstock for reuse that continues to grow year after year,” commented Baas.

In 2014, Governor Rick Snyder challenged Michigan residents to double the residential recycling rate from the current 15% within the next two years. Kent County is teaming up with regional and statewide stakeholders to determine the best ways to meet this challenge while at the same time generating a higher quality material from recycling programs. The recycling industry is struggling with increasing contamination from curbside recycling containers and drop-off recycling stations which contributes to increased processing costs, lower commodity value and health and safety concerns at the processing facilities.

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