

Live Oak recycling effort reaching 1,500 households

By JENNIFER KOSS
STAFF WRITER

Six days a week the sun comes up on a long, white truck trundling slowly up and down Live Oak's streets.

Frequently the truck clanks to a halt and its driver — a tall, red-headed fellow — jumps down to retrieve the bundled newspapers and bagged jars and cans stacked on the curbs along his route. The words printed on the side of the truck match those on the heavy, plastic-coated bags: Live Oak Curbside Recycling.

For 31-year-old Dave Davis, recycling is not just a job, it's a way of life. He's worked eight hours a day, Monday through Saturday, for the past two years to get Central County Garbage's recycling program off the ground.

"I'll do anything within my power and my abilities to try to convince you that you should recycle," he said.

Davis' efforts are paying off, according to senior county planner Dan deGrassi. Participation in the curbside recycling program has increased from about 15 percent one year ago to 40 percent today, he said. That translates into 1,500 households of the 3,500 in the service area extending from Santa Cruz to Capitola and Highway 1 to the ocean.

In terms of waste materials, Davis said he's collected about one million pounds since the program started — 400,000 the first year and 600,000 the second, but that's not enough.

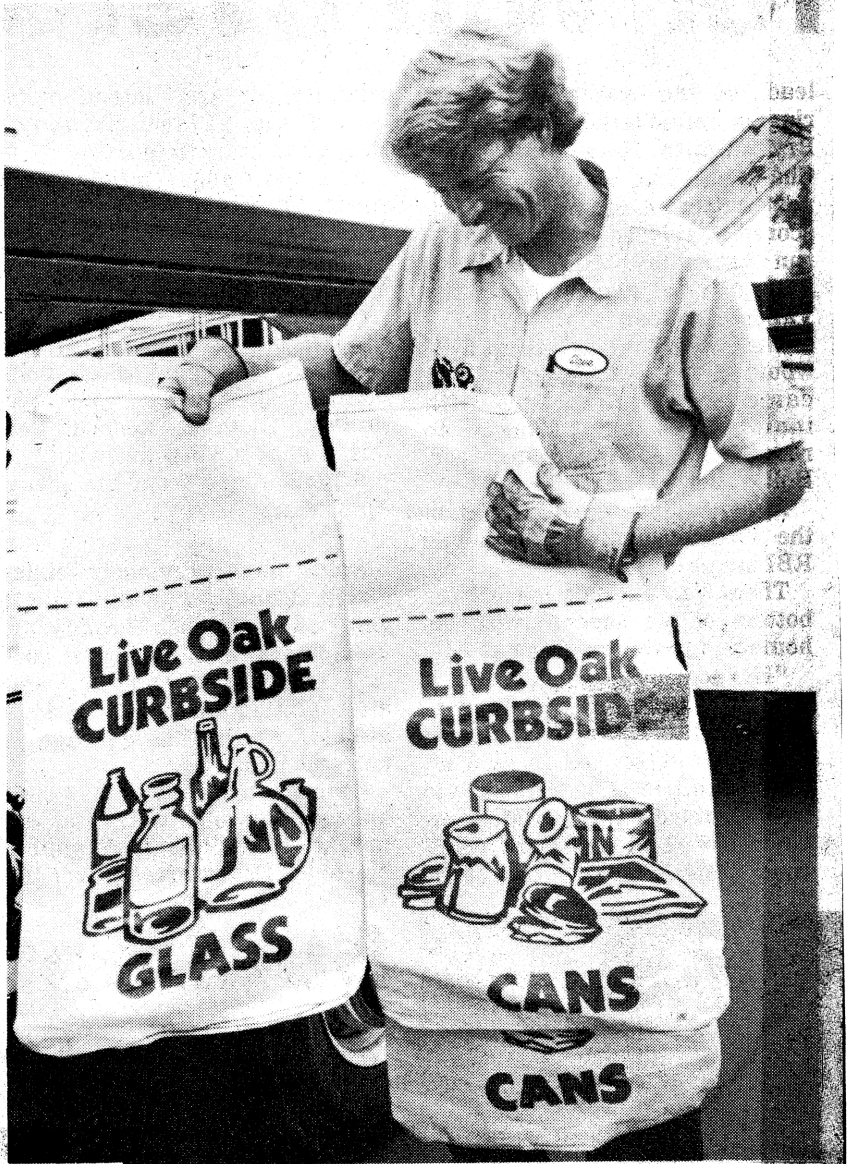
"I'm just never satisfied with the amount that we're getting," he said. "I'm always looking for more."

Though recycling makes sense environmentally, 50 percent participation is needed for it to make sense economically, Davis said. However, he added, the success of the program cannot be measured by profit alone.

"It's not how much money we're making, it's how much money we're saving that makes the big difference," he said.

Davis figures he retrieves at least \$1,000 worth of materials a month that would otherwise be dumped into the Buena Vista landfill.

Lou Chelone, one of the four owners of Central County Garbage, said the program may be as successful as it's going to get, as far as his garbage company is concerned.



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For collector Dave Davis recycling is a way of life

"We're not making any money on it," he said, adding that he's not so sure a higher participation rate would move it into the black.

Davis is handling about as many recyclables as he can at this point, Chelone said, so a higher participation rate would mean acquiring another truck and driver. It costs the company about \$55 an hour to operate such a truck, he added.

Neither is Chelone persuaded that the curbside recycling program will ever become a mon-

eymaker. Market prices paid for recyclables simply fluctuate too much, he said.

The recent drop in oil prices hasn't helped. Where before he used to get 15 cents a gallon for used motor oil, Chelone said he's had to pay 20 cents a gallon to get rid of it in the last month or two.

Scrap metal, which once brought \$38 a ton, has dropped to \$12. On top of all that, the garbage company recently received notice its insurance has increased 379 percent.

GREEN SHEET
May 14, 1986