

Michigan Municipal League

# Recycle Here!



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Better Communities. Better Michigan.

## PROJECT DETAILS:

### NAME:

Recycle Here!

### DATE:

2005-Present

### LOCATION:

Detroit, Michigan

### CATEGORIES:

Green Initiatives

Public Art

Community Gathering Place

K-12 Education

### THE CHALLENGE:

How do you create a culture of cool around something as mundane as recycling, especially in a community with little history of recycling success?

### THE GIST:

Recycle Here! started out as a traditional drop-off center in a community with few recycling options. Through the creativity of its staff, volunteers, and participating citizens, it has become a community gathering place and a showcase for artists and musicians.



# Recycle Here!

## PROJECT SCOPE:

### Overview:

When Recycle Here! started in 2005, its founders had very traditional waste reduction and environmental concerns in mind. The city of Detroit was, at that time, the largest city in North America with no recycling program. A small but energetic group of Wayne State University students were interested in filling that void for the Midtown neighborhood. They started out small, with a dumpster in a bar's parking lot once a month. They quickly realized there was more to it than expected, as the creation of such a simple program was inspiring significant growth in neighborhood social interaction and sense of community.

In 2007, the Greater Detroit Resource Recovery Authority began funding the program as the city's official recycling center. The program has grown by over 50 percent each year since opening and spun off additional programs. There are now mobile and neighborhood drop-off stations around the city, a nonprofit educational arm, Green Living Science, and a for-profit arm, GreenSafe.

The main location has become more than a busy recycling center. It is also now a community gathering place. This grew from the influence of the art community that was first attracted to the location by affordable studio space. Keith Haring-inspired artist Carl Oxley III, who had a nearby studio, created a cheerful bee mural that became the official logo of Recycle Here! After that, artists converged on the building, creating murals large and small. Soon after, music was added to the mix, and the Saturday drop-off center became something of a party.



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In 2011, the property became home to the Lincoln Street Art Park, an outdoor gallery of art created primarily from spray paint and found objects. The park was made possible through a partnership with Detroit Synergy, Midtown Inc., the Michigan Council on Arts and Cultural Affairs, and a successful Kickstarter funding campaign. The park was previously an unkempt, underutilized area, but since the gallery was created it has become a gathering point for the neighborhood, hosting frequent bonfires, musical performances and other events. There has been no illegal dumping or vandalism on the property, and the foot and vehicle traffic on the block has increased. The Park (and some of its sculptures in residence) has an active social media presence and has been profiled on numerous websites and in newspapers.

#### **Project Scope:**

Rapidly growing recycling drop-off program with over 65,000 visits in 2012, both at their main facility at 1331 Holden Street and at mobile and neighborhood drop-off stations around the city. Green Living Science educational nonprofit has educated over 50,000 school children through a partnership with Detroit Public Schools. The for-profit arm of the operation, GreenSafe, is now providing cups for the Detroit Lions and had over \$2 million in sales in 2012. Lincoln Street Art Park hosts frequent community events and showcases the work of many local muralists, sculptors and musicians.

#### **Accomplishments:**

- Established the first municipal recycling center in the city of Detroit, with over 65,000 citizen visits in 2012.
- In 2012, became the first recycling center in Michigan to receive the Detroit Free Press Green Leader award.
- Created the environmental education nonprofit organization, Green Living Science, which has educated over 50,000 students in Detroit Public Schools.
- Created a for-profit company, GreenSafe, which had over two million dollars in sales in 2012.
- Dramatically reduced illegal dumping and vandalism on the property.
- Conducted successful Kickstarter campaign to transform a vacant lot into an art park.



**Budget:** \$240,000 per year

**Funding:** None

**Organization:**

Public-private partnership between Recycle Here, LLC and the city of Detroit.

**Participants:**

City of Detroit, Greater Detroit Resource Recovery Authority, Detroit Public Schools, citizens of Detroit

**Inspiration:**

Detroit's tradition of community and family gatherings on Saturdays at Eastern Market

**Actions Taken:**

**“GIVE EVERY CITIZEN THE OPPORTUNITY TO DO THE RIGHT THING.”**

In this case, there was a pent-up unmet demand for an alternative to the landfill or the incinerator for waste disposal. Therefore, despite skepticism about the potential success of a city of Detroit recycling program, Recycle Here! has seen enthusiastic responses since its early days.

**“GET PEOPLE EXCITED AND GET THEIR ATTENTION.”**

**“CONNECT WITH ARTISTS.”**

Recycle Here! accomplishes this through its now ever-present bee logo and mascot, as well as other eye- and ear-catching art.

**“IF YOU DRESS UP THE FACILITY, PEOPLE WILL TAKE CARE OF IT.”**

**“JUST BECAUSE IT’S A PLACE WHERE WASTE GOES, IT DOESN’T HAVE TO LOOK LIKE IT.”**

They chose early on to embrace and celebrate quality graffiti, rather than trying to fight it. They found that graffiti writers respect others' work and will not deface it if it's well-done. Same goes for the outdoor art at the Art Park, an area which has seen a dramatic reduction in vandalism since the fence was removed and the public space was created.



**“START WITH THE KIDS...IT’S LIKE PUTTING AN AGENT OF CHANGE IN EVERY HOUSE.”**

Recycle Here! has witnessed a tangible uptick in recycling rates in neighborhoods where their Green Living Science program has educated school children. Children can be more effective at changing behavior than any refrigerator magnet or brochure.

**“MAKE RECYCLING FEEL LIKE A SPECIAL EVENT AND PROVIDE AN EXPERIENCE.”**

**“SHORTEN HOURS OF OPERATION, CREATE A CONCENTRATION OF PEOPLE.”**

This point may go against the conventional wisdom that an accessible program should be open as many hours as possible, but Recycle Here! could never have generated such success without the limited access it provides, creating the social atmosphere.

**“EMBRACE THE TRADITIONS OF YOUR COMMUNITY.”**

The program’s Saturday success story builds on the Detroit tradition of family visits to Eastern Market on that day of the week.

**“TRACK PROGRESS.”**

Recycle Here! staff can reel off an impressive list of statistics that represent the program’s growth from its launch in 2005, and that can also be broken down by geographic area of the city.

**Lessons Learned:**

**“WISDOM BEGINS IN WONDER. WHEN THINGS ARE WEIRD, IT DISARMS PEOPLE AND PUTS THEM ON A LEVEL PLAYING FIELD.”**

Create a nonprofit organization early on, if a government or nonprofit entity does not already host the program. This allows for more aggressive pursuit of funding options.

**“BE FRIENDLY.”**

Focus effort on customer relations and creating a welcoming, empowering atmosphere.

**“ALL EMPLOYEES SHOULD BE VOLUNTEERS FIRST.”**

Focus on incremental behavioral change versus changing the world overnight.

**Similar Projects:**

Recology Waste Transfer Stations in San Francisco and Portland, Oregon

Eco-Art Lab in Wayland, Massachusetts

**Expert:**

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# The Center for 21st Century Communities

## Building 21st century communities

Experts from around the world—in academic, business, and public sectors alike—agree that investing in communities is a critical element to long-term economic development in the 21st century. Michigan’s future depends on its ability to attract and retain knowledge-based workers. Central to attracting this priceless commodity is *place*. Research proves that successful 21st century communities effectively leverage the assets summarized in this brochure. Learn more and stay engaged at [mml.org](http://mml.org).

## Who we are...

The Michigan Municipal League is the one clear voice for Michigan communities. We are a nonprofit, but we act with the fervor of entrepreneurs; our people are dynamic, energetic, and highly approachable, passionately and aggressively pushing change to achieve better communities and a better Michigan.

## What we know...

Never before have so many diverse interests, from academic researchers to the business community to government leaders, shared a single conclusion: Michigan’s future depends on its ability to attract knowledge-based workers. And what is central to attracting this priceless commodity? *Place*, specifically vibrant 21st century communities.

## What we offer...

Through its Center for 21st Century Communities (21c3), the League provides education, technical assistance, public outreach, and unprecedented access to experts and resources. The 21c3 is a “one-stop-shop” for communities interested in creating and sustaining livable, desirable, and unique places that attract the highly skilled, creative, and talented workforce of the next century.



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