

Duncan. “Grazing isn’t justified ecologically and we need to remain faithful to scientific evidence, but people also need to be connected to the land and we need to be realistic about what we can accomplish. After all, we’d rather have cattle than dirt bikes.”

As a result of this outreach, their grassroots support is impressive. In their annual appeals letter, they get a 12 to 14 percent response, which is, as Duncan says, “three or four times what you could possibly hope for.” Their average donation is \$100, which indicates that “people are really making an effort to contribute to us, responding every year to the fullest degree that they can. Our supporters are incredibly loyal, and we’re getting checks from people with limited income that are proportionately huge to their income.”

Slowly and tenaciously, Malheur Field Station is helping to bring the southeast corner of Oregon to statewide visibility, mobilizing cross-sector local support to raise awareness of the conservation challenges and natural wonders of this remote region. Places like the Malheur Field Station, as Duncan knows, are essential both intellectually and emotionally. He says that such places introduce new perspectives and new ways of living, and they build empathy between communities and geographies. Duncan’s philosophy is simple: “It’s important that people get out of the city and meet themselves in a different context. It’s important for people to learn and see Oregon in its fullest state. It’s good for Oregon, it’s good for ecology, and it’s good for the soul.”

**“SMALL THINGS HAVE A BIG EFFECT”:
BRING RECYCLING’S BATTLE AGAINST WASTE**

Another nonprofit that has benefited from a diverse and grassroots donor base is BRING Recycling in Eugene. Among Oregon’s most venerable conservation organizations, BRING was founded in 1971 as an outgrowth of the first Earth Day (1970) and the burgeoning ecology movement. Now in its fifth decade, its mission to “reduce, reuse, recycle, rethink” has only increased in relevance and urgency, and the organization has remained nimble in adapting their services to changing social and environmental needs.

On a frosty winter morning, Executive Director Julie Daniel shared what BRING has accomplished and how it’s changed over the years. Daniel, originally from England, is elegant and animated. “We see ourselves as a social change organization,” she begins. “There’s a social equity angle to the work we do: pollution and climate change have a far greater effect on the poor and disadvantaged in the world. We needed to help people understand that we need to do more with less for reasons of equity, economy, and environment.”

How the organization has advanced this message has changed over the decades, Daniels notes. For the first thirty years, BRING was a recycling



BRING's electrical aisle. Photo by Kristin Anderson.

center, processing and reselling recycled materials. “Even though we were a social change organization, we operated like a business, supported by our income,” Daniel says. But BRING was a victim of its own success: Lane County grew to have the highest recycling rate in Oregon, and recycling became big and high-tech business across the country.

In the late nineties, BRING decided to refocus. “Recycling is how you manage waste you’ve already made,” Daniel explains. “We realized that in order to achieve our mission, we needed to focus more on waste prevention and reuse. We also needed to rebrand,” she adds. “We had this kind of hippie, counterculture image. We wanted our message to go mainstream.” They had an ambitious vision of what they wanted: a sleek, modern processing center and an appealing storefront for reusable goods, with educational content, community space, and a strong emphasis on chic design and artistic appeal. “We wanted [to be] a desirable thing rather than a negative message: we didn’t want ‘the world is going to hell in a handbasket and dolphins are dying’—we wanted something fun and creative and positive.”

What they dreamed into existence was the Planet Improvement Center, a complex that incorporates the BRING offices, a lush bioswale garden, a showroom, and several adjacent warehouses and workshops in which reusable goods are repaired, organized, and displayed for resale. The complex also features a courtyard that has hosted several weddings and a yard for storing bigger reclaimed items like lumber, pipes, and railroad ties. Every corner houses creative works of art and architecture, including a life-size rhinoceros lording over the garden: all are constructed out of reused or donated goods.

This attractive new hub allows BRING to not only sell their goods more effectively but also to expand their outreach agenda. They provide conservation education for all Lane County students in grades K-12, both through



An elaborate fence made of reused materials, with the rhinoceros wallowing in the bioswale behind. Photo by Kristin Anderson.

classroom visits and through leading field trips to their own or other waste-handling facilities. They also give talks to service organizations, clubs, and community centers, lead how-to workshops on conservation and reuse at their center, and offer businesses free confidential consulting on how they can cut down on waste and water usage and increase energy efficiency.

But before BRING could do all of this—build the center and expand its outreach—it needed to approach donors and grantmakers in a much more strategic way. The Gray Family Foundation, the Meyer Memorial Trust, and the Murdoch Foundation each awarded the organization six-figure grants to help get off the ground, and the Collins Foundation, Weyerhaeuser, and others gave them additional large grants and gifts. However, much of the \$3 million raised came from grassroots supporters and smaller donors, many of whom had been supporting BRING for twenty or thirty years. “We’d do house parties, talk to individuals, ask for anything from \$5 to \$1000, and then next year, we’d talk to them again and they’d give a little bit more,” Julie explains. “We became a lot more accountable: the process of raising funds put us out in the community and raised awareness, but we also learned how to explain ourselves better to the business community, to grantmakers, and even to our long-term supporters; we learned to build up points of intersection,” Julie says. “Philanthropy has helped us to grow up. When people start giving you money, it gives you a tremendous sense of responsibility.” BRING feels a deep commitment to their volunteers and donors, she says. “We have a strong and committed volunteer board, and we are very dependent upon and grateful for our smaller donors. When someone says to you, ‘Here’s fifteen dollars; I wish I could give more but I’m on a fixed income,’ they’re looking to

you to do things that they believe in. We want to prove ourselves accountable stewards of each gift.”

Julie pauses and then shares an example. “We got a note from an elderly couple, Jeanne and Herb,” she tells us, “each of whom contributed \$5 and sent it in.” BRING sent them a thank-you note, and Julie, touched by the couple’s faith in them, describes what happened next. “They sent us a letter back with another \$10 and a note that said, ‘Your courteous note thanking us for our paltry donation has inspired us to give a little more. Thanks for the work that you do.’ It was so moving. . . . We don’t take *any* gifts for granted,” she asserts fervently.

BRING is the kind of organization that inspires this kind of response across the community. It has a mailing list of over sixty-five hundred households, and the number of its regular donors is not much smaller. One, Ardyth McGrath, has never been to their new facility, but she is a devotee of BRING’s mission nonetheless. At eighty-one, Ardyth has been contributing regularly since 2007 and has donated over \$350 through donations of \$10. “I remember when I first heard about them. They said what they were doing and I thought they needed help,” Ardyth explains. “I live alone, and there’s not too many ways I can help the environment. I just think that BRING is doing a great job. . . . I can’t do very much, but if I give what I can every month, and if a thousand other people do the same, then they’re getting a lot of money,” she declares. “I feel better if I give. God has been good to me, and it’s time for me to give back.”

Ardyth’s rationale echoes Julie Daniel’s precisely. Julie says that if it weren’t for BRING’s volunteers and corps of small donors, they wouldn’t be who they are now: a pillar of Eugene’s community and a success both as conservation educators and as a comprehensive source—a treasure trove, really—of reusable materials. When asked about their successes, Julie is proud. “I think we’ve created a culture: the idea that when you’re done with something it doesn’t go in the garbage.” Their mission dovetails perfectly with their funding model, Julie says. “Philanthropy is a lot like recycling. One piece of paper in the scheme of things is irrelevant; one \$5 gift is too, but if you do it regularly, and if ten people do it regularly, then you’ve got a system that works. There’s no difference between your regular \$5 and a one-time big check. Small things, done over time, have a big effect.”

Another BRING donor, Julie Rogers, whom Julie Daniel calls “Julie II,” agrees. Julie Rogers is seventy-three years old and has donated about twenty times, totaling over \$300. Julie describes her as “a true believer.” Ms. Rogers started off as a volunteer with BRING many years ago and has supported them ever since. “Recycling is a part of me; it’s what I’ve been doing all my life,” she says. “I was at the first Earth Day and it just seemed to make so much

sense, so I was delighted when I discovered BRING.” Ms. Rogers, a retired teacher, says that BRING’s accomplishments “take your breath away. They’re a wonderful asset to the world, and to the community, and everyone I know uses BRING or gives goods to it. There’s a Hebrew phrase, *tikkun olam*, which means ‘world repair.’ That’s exactly what BRING does.”

CONSERVATION THROUGH ART: BANDON’S VOLUNTEER-DRIVEN WASHED ASHORE PROJECT

Across the coast range and down Highway 101 from Eugene, a very different “world repair” project is emerging. The south coast town of Bandon may be famous for its golf and its dunes, but to artist and educator Angela Haseltine Pozzi, its beaches were becoming famous for a less appealing feature: trash.

“I’d spent every summer of my childhood poking around in tide pools in Bandon,” Angela explains. “And then in 2004, when my husband and I were living in Portland, he had a stroke, was diagnosed with a brain tumor, and died. It stopped my whole world,” she says. “I reached a point where I felt like I needed a big change. I escaped back to the ocean, which was my healing place.” She spent many hours walking up and down Bandon’s beaches, but in those months after the move, she began to notice something. “I started seeing more and more plastic on the beach and I couldn’t believe what was happening to an environment I’d always loved. I came to the ocean to heal,” she declares, “and found that it needed healing itself. And then I realized I’d found my purpose.”

An art teacher and gallery artist for over thirty years, she decided she could work with the skills she already had. She recruited volunteers to help collect pieces of marine debris—soda cans, fishing lines, floats, flip-flops, glass bottles, Styrofoam, tires, milk jugs, and countless other types of detritus. Some clearly had been dumped locally, and other pieces had washed ashore



Bandon’s shoreline. Photo by Kristin Anderson.