

“Top-of-the-line dirt” at Salvation Army in Billings



Barrels of processed compost Photo by Lura LeMar



Salvation Army workers get their hands dirty establishing a business enterprise.

The Billings (Mont.) Corps has given a whole new meaning to the expression “cheaper than dirt” with their latest “Bokashi” project.

The Salvation Army in Billings, teamed with the Rimrock Foundation, received a \$300,000 grant from the Department of Housing and Urban Development to get the program going.

Bokashi is a cold compost method developed in Japan that combines kitchen scraps—vegetables, fruit, meat and dairy—with a mixture of wheat germ or sawdust, molasses and microorganisms that cleanse and revitalize the mixture.

The Army has already purchased a shredder for processing the food waste and a “tipper” for draining the liquid from the compost barrels.

The best of the dirt will be sold to home gardeners and the rest will go to community and school gardens that the Army is helping to establish.

“It will be top-of-the-line dirt—we think as good as you’re going to find,” Major Kevin Jackson, corps officer, said.

Not only will the venture provide income, it will also employ nine formerly homeless men who are graduates of the corps’ substance abuse course.

Besides physical labor, the men will be sharpening their business skills by attending environmental management classes and running the business themselves—taking inventory, purchasing and budgeting.

Jackson said he is surprised at how enterprising the workers are, adding that they are three months ahead of what was expected at this time.

As new employees are hired, instructors will be dispatched to other Salvation Army facilities to educate and assist them in establishing composting businesses of their own.

Information from an article by Ed Kemmick of billingsgazette.com