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IWU Joins Composting Effort

February 14, 2011

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. – Illinois Wesleyan University is doing more than talking trash.

A new composting initiative by the University is rerouting thousands of pounds of food from area landfills to a local farm. The effort, which began in late January, has already resulted in 4,200 pounds of food waste being sent from IWU for composting.

Composting, or the process of turning organic materials into naturally enriched soil, was originally proposed by a Green Task Force at IWU nearly a decade ago. The idea was adopted by the GREENetwork, a University organization composed of students, faculty and staff that works to make the campus more sustainable.

“Composting food enables Illinois Wesleyan to fulfill its mission to function in a more environmentally sustainable manner,” said R. Given Harper, who is the a member of the GREENetwork as well as the George C. and Ella Beach Lewis Endowed Chair of Biology.

In 2008, IWU student Thomas Schroeder created a feasibility study of composting on campus for a class on health and the environment. The study expanded into a project with Harper, who took the study to the IWU administration. “It was decided we did not have the space for composting, or a location to store the end product,” said Schroeder, a 2009 graduate who now works as a scientist with the environmental consulting firm Bradburne, Briller & Johnson, LLC in Chicago.

Harper then advanced the idea with the Bloomington City Council. “At lot of groups were having similar problems. They did not have the infrastructure and resources to make composting work then,” said Carl Teichman, director of community relations at IWU. “There was a will, but not a way.”

The way came in a communitywide initiative spearheaded by Illinois State University, which invited other organizations to join their composting efforts. The initiative allows composting materials to be picked up by Midwest Fiber, and the composted dirt to be deposited for use at the Illinois State Farm near Lexington.

The impact of IWU’s composting will continue for generations, said Kari Grace, a senior at IWU and a member of the GREENetwork. “Composting diverts food waste that would otherwise end

up in landfills,” she said. “In addition to taking up space, landfills also produce methane, a greenhouse gas that contributes to climate change. The compost is used to return nutrients to the soil, reducing the need for chemical fertilizer.”

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