

# Community celebrates new recycling facility



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Cardboard material moving along conveyor belts, shattering glass and fork lifts carrying heavy loads of recyclable material provided an appropriate backdrop on Friday to a ceremony to celebrate the grand opening of the Material Recovery Facility.

The Garten Services facility, at 3334 Industrial Way in northeast Salem, is housed in a 90,000-square-foot warehouse that looks a lot like a maze of multi-colored, multi-textured bails of recycled material.

Garten is a nonprofit established in 1970 for people with disabilities and longterm mental illness. It now serves about 500 people by providing vocational, day activity and retirement services out of five locations in the Willamette Valley, including three sites in Salem, one in Dallas and one in Eugene.

A large group of supporters from the community including county commissioners, city councilors and members of the Salem and Keizer chambers of commerce gathered to hear remarks from Kathy Moreland, president of Garten's board of directors, and CEO Tim Rocak.

Both touched on the significant impact the facility will have on local jobs and the environment. Rocak began by thanking the employees who work there every day.

"Their work has brought us to where we are today," he said.

Gaelen McAllister, Garten Resource Development Manager, said that 160 people currently work at the recycling facility, and more jobs are expected to be added as the volume of material increases.

"So many people are recycling now that we needed new machinery," McAllister said while guiding a tour through the new facility. "This looks really messy, but that's because we get 1 million pounds a week and send it back out."

The facility receives 1,000 tons per month, but has the capacity to receive three times that much. It takes four minutes for material brought in to the facility to become part of a large bale, which can weigh anywhere between 1,200 and 2,500 pounds.

Longtime Garten employee Jordan Blank has the task of sorting through materials on a conveyor belt. He threw away certain pieces of plastic, clothing, plastic bags and food that made it on to the belt.

"It's fun," Blank said.

"The major thing we're supposed to pick up is Christmas lights because they get stuck."

Rocak said at the ceremony that the founders of the nonprofit may not have imagined the facility, "but I'm pretty sure their vision did encompass exactly what we're celebrating today."

Rocak also thanked donors, including individuals, the city of Salem, Marion County, private companies who matched public investment, the Department of Commerce and vendors who either bring in the material or buy it after it has been recovered.

In February, the U.S. Department of Commerce announced a \$1.5 million grant from the Economic Development Administration to pay for improved recycling equipment and providing more jobs at Garten Services. The federal funding required a local match, which came through grants from the city of Salem Community Development Block Grant

program, Meyer Memorial Trust and Murdock Charitable Trust, making the project a \$2.18 million total investment into the facility.

Lastly, Rocak thanked the members of the community who regularly recycle.

"Those are the commodities that pay the wages," Rocak said.

"We were about sustainability before it was cool. You helped create a community that cares about the environment."

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