

Recyclers rewarded for mounds of effort

By **BARB AARDEMA**

Chronicle staff writer

Anyone wanting a lesson in grass-roots activism should spend time with Betty Dahlstrom and Holly Hughes.

The leaders of the White Lake Recyclers have found that a positive attitude coupled with patience, persistence, research and hands-on, follow-up work pays off.

Since recycling bins were made available in the White Lake area — primarily because of the recycling group's efforts — materials picked up for recycling have totaled 37 tons in the last five months of 1989, 142 tons in 1990 and 193 tons through the first eight months of this year.

To encourage recycling, the small band of about eight core members has brought its low-key approach to public, private and school groups, meeting by meeting, one step at a time. They speak their minds then mind what hap-

Since recycling bins were made available in the White Lake area, materials picked up for recycling have gone from 37 tons in the last five months of 1989 to 193 tons through the first eight months of this year.

pens as a result of their efforts.

The crusade hasn't been without setbacks.

The White Lake Recyclers formed in response to the state Department of Natural Resources' announcement of statewide recycling goals.

Dahlstrom contacted the White Lake Area Solid Waste Authority about setting up a recycling station after attending a 1988 DNR meeting on the subject. The authority operates a transfer station used by residents of the cities of Whitehall and Montague and White River, Montague, Blue Lake and Whitehall townships.

The board initially worried that recycling would place too much burden on the attendant at the transfer station and that the authority's budget might not be able to afford hauling fees.

Dahlstrom and Nancy Frye, the group's first co-chairwomen, eased concerns by enlisting volunteers to staff a recycling center at the transfer station. With about 40 people committed for six months, Dahlstrom asked for support from the Whitehall City Council.

"This seemed to be the thing

Please see **RECYCLERS**
Page 2A



Chronicle/DAVE CAR

Holly Hughes, left, and Betty Dahlstrom, leaders of White Lake Recyclers, show some of the fruits of their success.

RECYCLERS ...

Continued from Page 1A

that tipped the scales," she said.

The solid-waste authority agreed to the plan. A recycling bin was placed at the East Colby Road transfer station in July 1989.

But a recycling center without users isn't much good, so the group took it upon themselves to publicize the center. Hughes, who replaced Frye as co-chairwoman, said the group printed flyers and placed newspaper ads about how to recycle.

Group member Diana Anderson adapted a recycling photo slide program to include local shots, and with assistance from Quality Farm and Fleet Inc., created a brochure offering speakers and programs.

They took their program to community groups and schoolchildren. They sponsored a booth at the White Lake Business Expo.

The recyclers volunteered at a one-day magazine recycling station and surveyed business to find out what they were recycling. They provided Muskegon County commissioners with a survey of recycling coordinators from 10 counties when the county announced plans to hire its own coordinator. They also drafted a notice about the county's hazardous-waste collection days and delivered it to White Lake schools and churches and Howmet Corp., the county's largest employer, in Whitehall.

By early 1990 the county solid-waste reduction committee invited White Lake Recyclers to one of its meetings. Committee member Elsie Christensen, who was then the north area's county commissioner, said she had talked the county into putting one of its first recycling bins in White Lake.

"It was the first time we walked into a meeting and they didn't say (to us), 'You want what?'" Hughes said.

Encouraged that a bin would be placed in a more accessible, downtown location, the recyclers continued hands-on efforts. They cleaned up after people who left inappropriate items, sometimes transporting loads to another collection center.

"Togetherness" continued as the

recyclers worked with the White Lake Area Chamber of Commerce and Plumb's Inc. to move the transfer station bins to Plumb's Whitehall grocery store.

The White Lake solid-waste board didn't want to move the bins to a public place that would be open 24 hours because they didn't think the budget could handle more hauling fees. So, since Fruitland Township has a large population and isn't a member of the solid-waste authority, Hughes asked if Fruitland would help pay for a recycling center at Plumb's.

Hughes, with an audience full of supporters, months later got Fruitland to pitch in \$2,000 for the Plumb's recycling center, and the authority agreed to the move.

"Business, government and citizens were all working together," Hughes said.

This year, the group helped bring about a rate decrease for hauling recyclables from the Plumb's site. They presented data on another firm's recycling fees to the White Lake solid-waste authority. Consequently, the authority negotiated a rate cut with Landco.

Even though recycling appears to be established in White Lake, Dahlstrom and Hughes aren't resting. The group is now campaigning for support of state recycling legislation and for curbside pickup in the community.

Hughes and Dahlstrom doggedly attended White Lake area city and township meetings over the past few months. Most of the governmental units and the White Lake Area Chamber of Commerce have passed resolutions supporting legislation that calls for 60 percent recycling by the year 2000, funding for a state recycling board and incentives for companies that use recycled materials. The recyclers have forwarded the resolutions to state representatives.

They continue to encourage Landco to complete a proposed recycling center in White Lake so haulers have a place to take curbside recyclables.