

Capitola food waste program picking up steam

By Tovin Lapan -- Santa Cruz Sentinel

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CAPITOLA - Gina Dekort, the manager at New Leaf's Capitola store, pulls a black waste bin out from under the juice bar and shows off the scraps inside.

"This is the good stuff," she said.

The bin from the juice bar looks like a basket of colorful confetti, with organic carrot, apple and kiwi shavings mixing together.

New Leaf, with a long history of championing sustainable practices, had been waiting eagerly for the opportunity to compost food waste from its Capitola store, and finally got its wish at the start of the year.

"We used to have people come and pick up some of the waste for composting, but it was irregular," Dekort said. "It's unfortunate when you have to put great compost like this in the garbage. Most of it is organic. We've been waiting for this program."

In January, Capitola kicked off a food waste management program modeled after the county's.

The city projects that the program could eventually reduce the amount of waste sent to the landfill by 20 to 30 percent. During an opening two-year pilot period, the city will target the largest food waste producers, with the hope of composting 50 tons of food waste per month.

Stores already weeding out their food scraps from the rest of their refuse include Whole Foods, Trader Joe's, Gayle's Bakery and Rosticceria, Dharma's Restaurant and Catering, Dairy Queen and Margaritaville. The Shadowbrook Restaurant, New Brighton Middle School and the Wharf House Restaurant have

all signed on, according to Green Waste Recovery General Manager Jim Moresco, and are waiting to receive bins and training.

"We've wanted to do it for a long time because we have so much food waste. We're glad that Capitola finally decided to do it," said Yogi Shapiro, manager of Dharma's. "I definitely think there is a big crowd of people, of customers, who find this important and want us to be composting."

The food waste, which is taken to Marina for composting, is collected at no extra cost to the businesses.

New Leaf has already reduced its container space for regular garbage thanks to the food waste program.

The city, in conjunction with state mandated goals, set a target of diverting 75 percent of waste from the landfill by 2010. After residential-based recycling programs successfully diverted 67 percent of the waste, the city was stagnating at that number, according to Lisa Murphy, Capitola assistant to the city manager.

The new program should "easily" put the city at or above its 75 percent diversion goal by the end of the year, Murphy said.

The program is only open to commercial establishments and other large food waste producers. Business owners in Capitola that are interested in participating can call Green Waste Recovery at 768-4750.