

# Sims designates two locals as Earth Heroes

BY SARA BADER

Parent Susan Meyer and lead custodian Dusty Duke have been named Earth Heroes at School by King County Executive Ron Sims for creating a recycling program at Issaquah Valley Elementary that has cut the school's trash in half.

Now in its fifth year, the Earth Heroes at School program annually recognizes people in county schools who work to protect and preserve the natural environment through education efforts.

"The future health of our precious planet depends on the lessons learned by our children today," Sims said in a statement. "We as their teachers, and the current caregivers of our environment's natural systems, have a responsibility to teach the lessons well so that we can protect the region's natural resources and environment."

School staff members nominated Meyer and Duke for making the recycling program successful, something the duo partially denies.

"The students, they're the real

heroes," Duke said. "They're the ones who have been doing all the work."

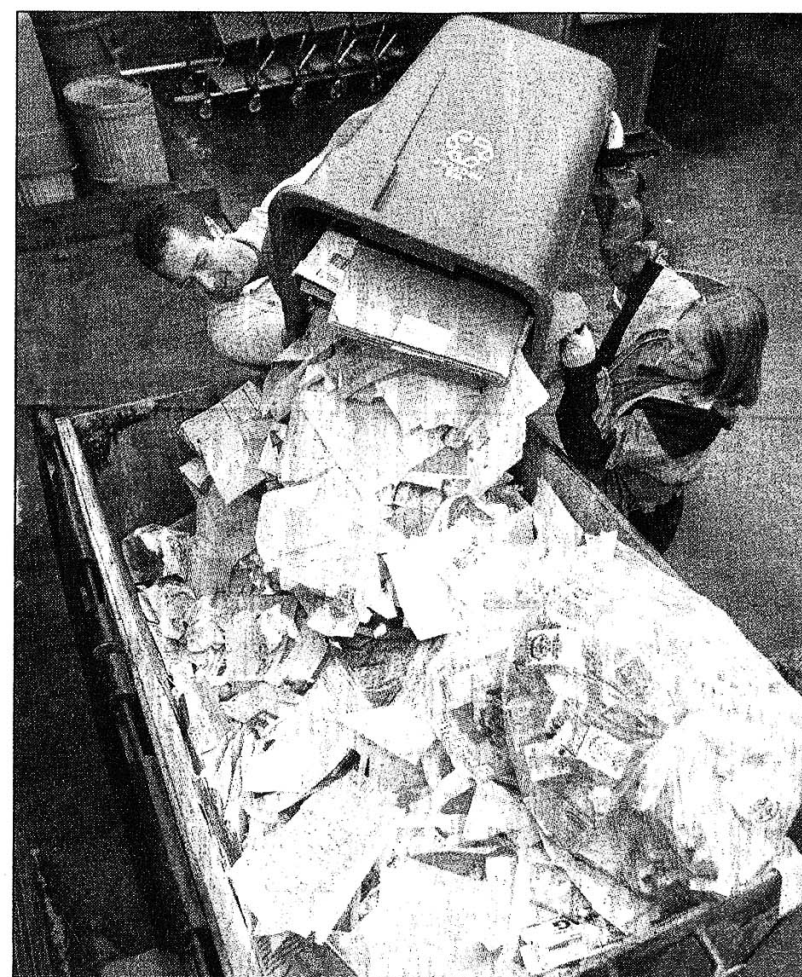
Meyer said she saw too much waste when walking the hallways, and decided to do something after hearing about the state Department of Ecology's Terry Husseman Sustainable Schools Awards.

"I looked in the trash cans and it bothered me," Meyer said. "They were full of plastic and paper and things that can be recycled."

She spearheaded the grant application process last year, and the school received a \$1,225 "Seed Award" to purchase bins to recycle bottles, cans, milk cartons and juice boxes in the cafeteria and elsewhere on campus. The new bins were brought out in late January.

A King County Green Schools expert worked with the school to figure out how to best use the money to develop a sustainable recycling program. That included lessons for kids about how to cut

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BY GREG FARRAR

Dusty Duke and Susan Meyer, recently named Earth Heroes, empty a bin of recycling at Issaquah Valley Elementary.

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# Earth heroes

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back on what they use.

Duke was a key player in planning and running the new program — including helping to broker a deal so that milk cartons do not have to be rinsed out, Meyer said.

“That was almost a show stopper,” she added.

Before the recycling push, garbage collectors emptied a 6-cubic-yard trash bin twice a week. That’s now dropped to once a week.

“That’s huge,” Duke said.

The anticipated savings from

reduced dump fees will likely be about \$4,000 a year. But one of the most rewarding benefits is when students tell him they have started their own recycling programs at home, Duke said. Kids also frequently bring him trash items they find on the playground to determine whether it’s recyclable.

“They’re really into it,” he said.

The school has already secured a \$675 Terry Husseman award for next year to begin food composting, Meyer said.

Duke and Meyer will receive their Earth Hero awards from Sims during a ceremony May 5 in Renton.

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