

Recycle Right: My Day Volunteering at Arlington Community Recycling Day

By Yingzi Yang, Recycling Committee

I moved to Arlington five years ago and I really love our amazing town. On one of the lovely Town Days, I met some awesome people and signed up to volunteer with the Recycling Committee. I want to share my story and invite others to join me and earn your own "Ask Me about Recycling" t-shirt.

If you have never been to our huge Community Collection Days, I can tell you I was completely surprised by how many things were dropped off in the first 30 minutes. I arrived the DPW parking lot at 9:30am so I could do an orientation before my official shift at 10:30. The buckets in front of the unloading desks were mostly full; volunteers are carrying metal scraps, books and Styrofoam to huge containers. The pile of clothes and toys was already like a small hill. When I thought I saw a ball pit, I went over to see, but quickly realized it was the station for redeemable bottles and cans. The Arlington High students had set up a very efficient system for sorting and counting bottles and cans and I was impressed with their clever solutions.

I was assigned to an unloading station with Yuki and Paul, recycling enthusiasts who, like me, volunteer often at recycling events. We enjoyed unloading cars and answering questions. I had a cheat sheet to help me and was grateful so many residents were willing to take my advice about what we could accept that day and what was trash they could throw away at home. People are very nice in Arlington!

Our team was later joined by Carly, a five-year-old volunteer who brought her mom. Carly was very smart and learned our rules and procedures in very short time. I was then able to take a cookie break and decided to try a different task -- standing by the paper shredding truck and collecting donations for the Arlington Food Pantry. Holding a plastic donation jar that was half the size of my torso, took me back my Girl Scout years. Although I am a very shy person, the task was not as challenging as I thought. Everyone I met was very generous. They came towards me even before I asked. My jar was half full in just three minutes. What nice residents we have in Arlington! I don't think I can say that too much.

Even though I'm a regular recycling volunteer now, I still use a cheat sheet to remind me what we accept at different events. At the beginning, I was reluctant to reject items that people took the time to bring because I was afraid it could make them feel recycling is not fun. However, I found most people did care if they had brought the correct things to the event. When I said "no" to items like alkaline batteries or Vinyl sheets, they had no issue taking them back home and said they would bring the correct things the next time.

I learned a lot and made great recycling friends that day. I can't wait for the next Community Collection Day and I really hope that some of you reading will join in the fun!

Arlington Recycling Committee welcomes your involvement as a recycler, as a volunteer at recycling events, or as a committee member. Information can be found at arlingtonma.gov/recycling, or use Town's Request/Answer page. Select "Ask a Question" and choose the "Recycling" category so your question is routed to Arlington's Recycling Coordinator.