

Net Zero Hero Malcolm Lyde, OMD turn trash into treasure

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Editor's note: This is the third in a series of articles about Fort Polk's Net Zero Heroes — community members who go above and beyond to make the post a more environmentally sound place to live. Net Zero is an initiative to eliminate as much waste as is created by the community. If you have someone you would like to nominate as a Net Zero Hero, call 531-1392.

FORT POLK, La. — Malcolm Lyde and the OMD Plumbing Shop on Fort Polk take recycling seriously. Lyde's drive to recycle harkens back to summers spent with his grandmother, born in 1898.

"She didn't throw anything away," said Lyde. "She had a rule that everything on the earth was limited. Either use a thing for its purpose or find a way to use it.

"Use or utilize it' is now my philosophy."

Lyde brought his philosophy to the shop, where the staff goes through their trash weekly to separate the recyclables from the trash.

"One employee takes plastic bottles to recycle; another takes the soda cans," said Lyde.

"When I became supervisor here, they were already reusing scrap metal. Then we started implementing brass and copper.

"When we go out and change the plumbing anywhere, we don't just throw pipes away. Being a licensed plumber for most of my life taught me to save anything too short to put in a pipe rack."

In other words, Lyde conserves materials others would readily throw away.

This is a boon not only for the earth but also for the shop, said Lyde.

"Recycling helps the earth and helps us, too; we have bits and pieces here that keep us from ordering unnecessary parts.

"We don't want to be wasteful and budgets are budgets," he said.

Lyde recently found out about Fort Polk's new white paper recycling program. The knowledge brought joy to his heart.

"My one heartache was that we had nothing to do with our paper before," he said.

"Now every Monday we have someone bring all the paper waste to the fill."

Lyde is a humble man who, though he's proud of his accomplishments recycling, doesn't want to take credit for doing anything extraordinary.

"It goes back to the way my grandmother taught me to live," he said.

The shop has honed recycling to a fine art, but, said Lyde, the credit goes to his crew. "It wouldn't be happening without their commitment," he said.

Lyde worked his trade in Iraq from 2003-2007, where he designed his own plumbing systems. While there, he was inspired to build a decorative fountain in the camp, one that everyone could enjoy.

"I dug a little bit by hand every night," he said. "I'd wander around and glean anything I could find."

Lyde used a HMWV window, a flattened oil pan, rocks that glistened green, white and red when wet and various other reused materials to make his fountain.

"Guys would just sit there and listen to the water splash," he said. "I think they found it a relaxing place in the middle of the desert. It was a very Zen place to be."

For Lyde, the fountain was symbolic; it was a



Licensed plumbers Cornie James (left) and Danny McClain recycle shredded paper as part of the Net Zero initiative to reduce waste.



Pipe fitter/welders Johnny Wayne Johnson (right) and Rickey Stephens prepare to toss a scrap piece of pipe into the recycle bin, where it will have a second life when a smaller piece of pipe is needed. "These guys are committed," said Lyde.

thing of beauty fashioned from others' trash.

"It just goes to show what you can do with limited resources," he said.

"You never know what you can do or what you can make with pieces of throw-away material. Everything is a resource."