



Leslie Davis, a pizza maker at Hy-Vee in Waterloo, took it upon herself to launch her store’s recycling program when she saw how many tin cans went into the trash.

“I couldn’t help but ask my dad (Kitchen Manager Mike Davis) if we could recycle these cans and plastic containers. I knew there must be some way to save these recyclables,” she says.

Mike bought a pair of 64-gallon bins for the tin cans. Gary Schmitz, a kitchen clerk/deliver driver and Leslie’s grandfather, took the bins to the recycling center when they were full.

He was soon was making two or more trips per week. And Mike decided to extend the effort to the plastic buckets that accumulate in the kitchen.

“We were recycling so much that we needed bigger bins,” Leslie says.

So Schmitz met with local waste officials, who provided two oversized rolling bins. Now nearly everything recyclable from the store—cardboard, like at other stores, is handled separately—goes into the bins, which are emptied every other week.

“It takes our store only five days to fill up one 400-gallon bin,” Leslie says. “When I initially asked my dad if we could recycle, my only dream was for our store to recycle as much as we could.”

Mike Smith, Hy-Vee’s director of real estate and sustainability, says Leslie’s passion and persistence are the key to any “green” initiative.

“This is a great example not only of the importance of recycling, but more importantly of people taking the initiative to do things when they are not happening on their own,” he says. “As someone who invests a great deal of time in looking for ways to make our company more environmentally friendly, I also understand that these efforts are not always easy.”

Smith said he would like to see other stores replicate the success and is willing to help them do it. Leslie says that’s what she had in mind all along.

“Going green is the new theme at our store,” she says. “And the entire company needs to join.”