

# Little red worm with a big re

## Hooks kids on recycling

By MARY McGRATH  
Staff Writer

How to get fourth-graders' attention: Ask whether they'd like to yank a slimy, squirming worm out of a box of smelly compost.

"Oh yes, take me!" "Me, I'll do it!" "Can I touch it?" Leaping and shouting, 50 students at Clifton's School No. 8 surged forward and watched as nature's tiny eating machine — the red worm — tunneled through a garbage pile the size of a fax machine and turned it into deep brown soil.

The demonstration was staged Wednesday by Alfred DuBois, Clifton's recycling chief, who is pushing to expand composting — already done in some back yards — to every apartment and condominium in Clifton, New Jersey's ninth-largest city.

Clifton has operated a leaf compost site for 10 years and gives about 4,000 tons of fertilizer a year to residents. But other vegetative wastes are given to a professional composter, who charges \$62,000 a year for processing and \$42 a ton for collecting 4,000 tons a year — an additional \$168,000.

DuBois says only household composting can effectively reduce the amount of vegetative garbage, with each family producing an estimated 500 pounds of garbage a year.

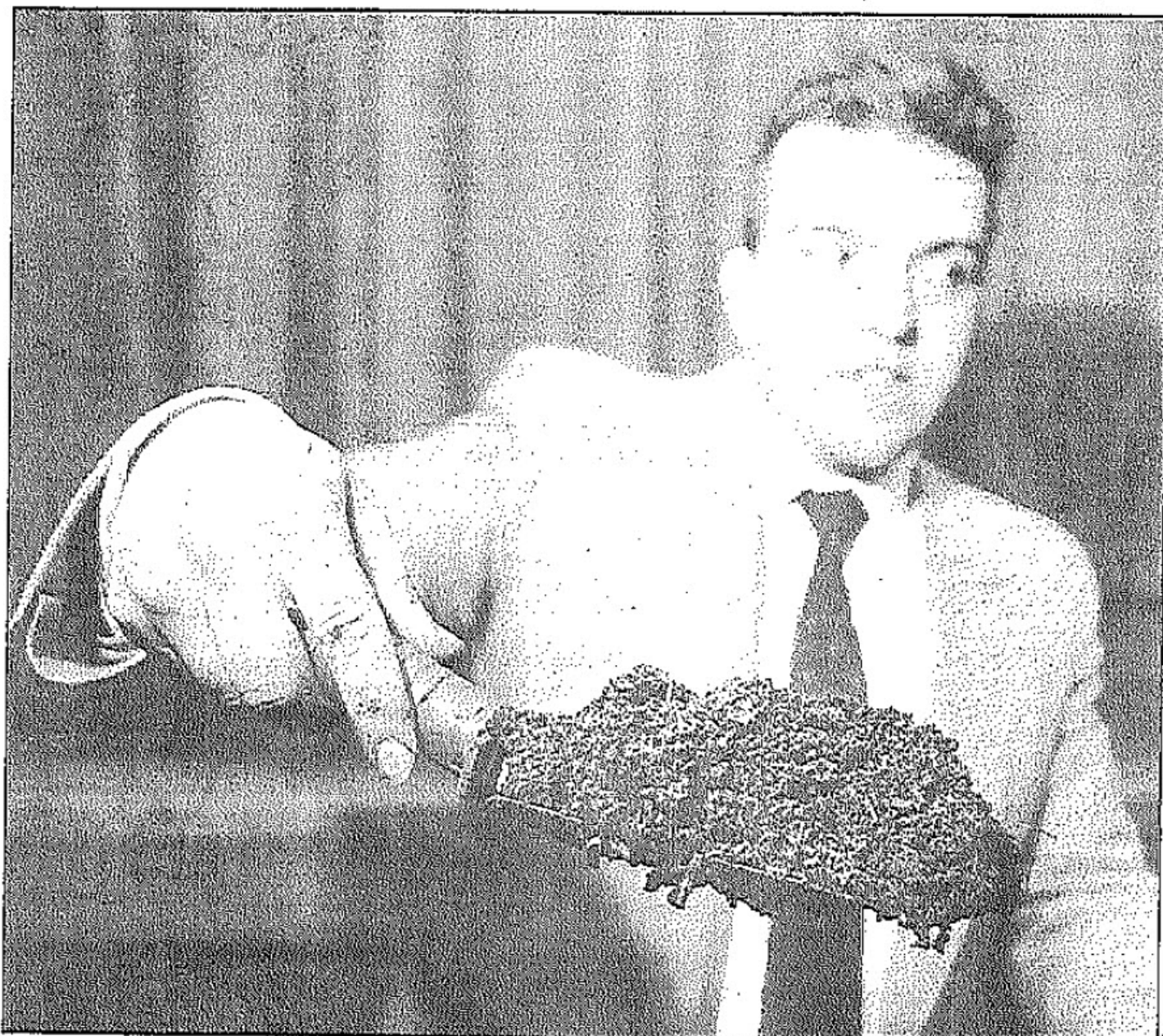
"The emphasis has to be on families — Reduce, Reuse, Recycle, and now compost, even in the winter months," said DuBois, reciting the mantra of the recycling movement.

And to get his message out, DuBois is going first to children.

For Wednesday's event, he donated two days' table scraps from his own household: four pounds of banana peels, coffee grounds, celery stalks, lettuce, melon rinds, and eggshells.

Using a blue recycling bin to hold the soil, the fourth- and fifth-graders helped mix the rotting waste teeming with red worms DuBois obtained at a horse farm on Garret Mountain.

"It looks like spaghetti," said one boy. "That dirt looks like



Alfred DuBois, Clifton's recycling coordinator, holding up some compost produced from household waste. STAFF PHOTOS BY THOMAS E. FRANKLIN

chocolate cake," said another.

As DuBois crumbled the soil in his palm, one boy held a worm over his mouth like a sword-swallower, and another pretended to lob one at some recoiling girls.

Of the estimated 600 Clifton families who already compost, most live in homes with yards. But compost heaps can be kept in plastic recycling bins in apartments and condominiums as well as in homes and in school science classes.

"I'd like to see every Clifton home with a compost heap under the kitchen sink," DuBois said. "In apartments, condos, and homes, they can compost most of these wastes. The worms are the key ingredient: They eat it up."

Indoor composting requires a 15-inch square box, a lid, topsoil,

worms, and kitchen scraps such as coffee grounds, tea bags, vegetables, fruit scraps, and eggshells. No meat, fat, or milk should be added because they produce odor.

Within three months, the worms will convert wastes into a rich humus that can be used as top dressing for houseplants, mixed with potting soil, or used for transplanting seedlings.

If each of Clifton's 20,000 households composted garbage, it would save on about 4,000 tons of the 30,000 tons collected a year, for a savings of about \$500,000 a year, DuBois said.

After the demonstration, one girl said she'd like to start composting at home.

"It was pretty good," said Alana Cantillo, 9. "But I don't know what person would want to grab those [worms]. But I guess I would if it helps the environment."

Lizzie Abreu, 9, and her family already compost.

"I go out after dinner, and my mother gives me a plate of food that we don't want to throw out, and I give it to the worms," Lizzie said.

Principal Anthony Barbary said he will look into creating an outdoor compost heap for students in conjunction with the science program.

"It brings us full circle with other recycling programs we've done," he said.