



MEET THE DUMPSTER PROJECT!

The Dumpster Project is many things: a sustainable home for a professor, a portable learning lab, a minimalist experiment and, most importantly, a creative branch of a wider green campus initiative at Huston-Tillotson University (HT), a historically black institution located in the heart of East Austin.

So, how on earth do you transform a dumpster? That's exactly the question that project lead, Jeff Wilson, asked while staring at a dumpster in a Starbucks parking lot over two years ago. Wilson, an environmental science professor and dean at HT, will be collaborating with students, scientists, engineers and the wider community by taking a used dumpster and retrofitting it into one of the world's smallest sustainable homes over the course of a year. He'll be living in the dumpster from start to finish and as the dumpster evolves, the wider campus will also undergo a major eco-upgrade as we extend the sustainability conversation into many aspects of the university — operations, education/research, and outreach.

The Dumpster Project aims to start a conversation around the idea of “less is more” by taking a creative and engaging route instead of a preachy one. Wilson and his students are suggesting that you can be a normal American—drive a car, work a job, be a parent, and contribute to society—all while living well in a small, low-impact space. The project also hopes to spark interest in the way that fun and forward-thinking innovation can help address the challenges facing both current and future generations as our world becomes increasingly complex.



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DUMPSTER DETAILS



WHO:

Dr. Jeff Wilson is leading this project as his wacky alter ego, Professor Dumpster--a hybrid version of Bill Nye the Science Guy, Ms. Frizzle, and Oscar the Grouch. Professor Dumpster has developed the project with the help of a world-class team of experts in the fields of design, engineering, education, and sustainability. He's also drawing heavily on the creative power of students at Huston-Tillotson University, both to renovate the dumpster and the campus.



WHAT:

There's no official handbook on transforming a dumpster, but we've got a basic strategy in place. Professor Dumpster and his students chose the perfect used dumpster, cleaned it, and took plenty of samples (we're still awaiting the results from the DNA sampling pre- and post-Dumpster bath). Now that it's squeaky clean and rust-proofed, the team is working to measure a water and energy baseline, and starting to investigate insulation solutions. From there it's a matter of how-low-can-you-go as the dumpster incorporate new solutions that range from simple (clothesline, rain garden) to more complex (solar panels, high-efficiency toilet).




WHERE:

The Dumpster Project is based on the beautiful campus of Huston-Tillotson University in Austin, Texas. Huston-Tillotson is a historically black institution with a population of approximately 1,000 students. The location of the project is intended to encourage active participation from communities that have typically been excluded from discussions about sustainability and the environment. While, HT is the home base, the Dumpster is also designed to be portable. The Dumpster Team takes the Dumpster to different events throughout Austin neighborhoods to promote the interactive nature



WHEN:

Now! All are welcome to visit the Dumpster on the Huston-Tillotson campus! Dumpster move-in was February 4, 2014, and for six months we were in Phase 1: Dumpster Camping. We moved into Phase II: Dumpster Residency on August 4, 2014. Professor Dumpster is slated to live in the dumpster for at least one year, but the life of the project will extend far beyond 365 days. If all goes well, Professor Dumpster has stated that he is not opposed to taking up permanent residence in his dumpster dwelling.

A photograph of a person sitting on a blue dumpster. The dumpster is covered in various graffiti tags and stickers. The person is wearing tan pants, purple and white striped socks, and brown shoes. They are sitting on the edge of the dumpster, with their legs hanging down. The background shows some greenery and a paved area.

FAQ

Why a dumpster?

While the project could have been centered around a large cargo container or a tiny house, we decided on the dumpster because it's the ultimate symbol of waste. People see a dumpster and associate it with "trash" or "stuff I don't want anymore." If The Dumpster Project achieves its goal, no one will be able to look at a dumpster without thinking, "Hmm, if that guy could live in a dumpster, I wonder what I could do?"

Are you suggesting that other people should live in dumpsters?

Um, no. We're highlighting the idea of "less is more" by taking it to an unexpected extreme. We are not encouraging people to trade in their 2500 sq ft home for a 33 sq ft trash can. What we are hoping is that the project will start dialogue about what's truly necessary for enjoying life and living well.

Is Professor Dumpster REALLY living in it?

Yes, Professor Dumpster, is *really living* in the dumpster, currently, now, and he has been since February 4, 2014. If he's traveling or at the family farm with his daughter then we have "guest tenants" take up temporary residence - a variety of students, friends, filmmakers, and the generally curious-minded. The goal is to have someone living in the dumpster every single day. Obviously Professor Dumpster will make other arrangements if there are temporary health risks like lightning, or a leak in the composting toilet.

What are the biggest challenges?

Design-wise, it's hard to find an element of this project that isn't a challenge. There are the obvious hurdles like lack of space, insulation, running water and electricity. Then there are subtler challenges like how to safely enter and exit the dumpster, send a WiFi signal through a metal box, and create a comfortable bed for a 6'1" guy in a 6'x6' space. Professor Dumpster will also have to figure out how to navigate relationships with friends, family and his significant other despite the restraints of a micro-space. Can he invite everyone over for dinner? Where will his daughter sleep when she's visiting?

How is the project contributing to the greater community?

This whole endeavor is way more than a weird professor living in a metal wastebasket. Beyond the obvious goal of creating one of the smallest sustainable living spaces on the planet, the project is heavily focused on engaging students and enhancing the Huston-Tillotson campus where it's located. Ultimately we're partnering with students to create a lively (and entertaining) discussion about what a good, sustainable life can look like and how to make that life available to more communities.



DR. JEFF WILSON PROFESSOR DUMPSTER

Jeff, aka 'Professor Dumpster,' is an Environmental Science

Professor and Dean at Huston-Tillotson University. He is author of dozens of scientific journal articles and is recipient of the University of Texas System's highest teaching honor. He did post-doctoral work at Harvard and received his PhD in Environmental Science from the University of Canterbury. Jeff will be guiding the project and serving as the educational face.



DR. KAREN MAGID OPERATIONS

Dr. Magid, aka 'La Doctora Basura' is project manager for

The Dumpster Project and Sustainability Coordinator for Huston-Tillotson University. She holds a PhD in Materials Science from UC-Berkeley and did post-doctoral work at the ETH-Zurich. She served as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Mexico working on knowledge and environmental sustainability projects related to green eco-technologies.



DR. AMANDA MASINO EDUCATION

Dr. Amanda Masino is Assistant Professor of Biology at

Huston-Tillotson University and co-Advisor to HT's Green is the New Black student group. She holds a PhD in Genetics from the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center and specializes in molecular analyses. Current projects include developing the design- and inquiry-based Dumpster curriculum.



LIZ OGBU DESIGN

Liz is an international award-winning environmental designer, social innovator, and

professor. She teaches courses at Stanford and is the first ever Scholar-in-Residence at the Center for Art & Public Life at California College of the Arts. Liz has been named a "Green Giant" for promoting sustainable design. She holds a BA in architecture from Wellesley and Master of Architecture from the Graduate School of Design at Harvard.



PLINY FISK III DESIGN

Pliny Fisk III founded and co-directs the oldest research/educational

organization in the US, The Center for Maximum Potential Building Systems, in Austin. 'The Center' has focused on next-generation design of buildings, water and energy systems for nearly 40 years. Pliny retired in 2011 as a Fellow and signature faculty at Texas A&M University, and has served in similar positions at five other universities.



GREG KLOEHN DUMPSTER YODA

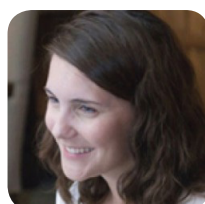
Greg Kloehn is an Oakland, California-based artist

and maker. He is a subject matter expert in the construction of small, unconventional living spaces and was the first to build a functional home out of a trash dumpster. Greg is currently leading the 'Homeless Homes Project' that has a goal of reclaiming materials from illegal street dumping and turning those materials into tiny mobile homes for the homeless.



DR. VANESSA SVIHLA EDUCATION ADVISOR

Vanessa is Assistant Professor of Teacher Education and Director of the IDDEA lab at the University of New Mexico. Dr. Svihla received both her MS in Geology and her PhD in Science Education from The University of Texas at Austin. As a learning scientist, she investigates learning technologies that support disciplinary practices.



DR. BARBARA BROWN-WILSON COMMUNITY ADVISOR

Barbara is Director of the Center for Sustainable Development (CSD) and Assistant Professor at the University of Texas at Austin School of Architecture. The CSD coordinates complementary programs of research, education, and outreach that espouse an interdisciplinary, integrative approach to sustainability.



DR. RICH CORSI ENGINEERING ADVISOR

Rich is the E.C.H. Bantel Professor for Professional Practice in Civil, Architectural and Environmental Engineering at the University of Texas at Austin. Rich has been extensively published and cited, including in popular media such as the Economist and Business Week and he has received numerous teaching awards.



DR. LES SHEPHARD WATER & ENERGY ADVISOR

Les is the Robert F. McDermott Distinguished Chair in Engineering and Director for the Texas Sustainable Energy Research Institute at the University of Texas - San Antonio. Previously, he served as VP of the Energy, Water and Nonproliferation Division at Sandia National Laboratories.



MEDIA

SEE WHAT OTHERS ARE SAYING ABOUT THE DUMPSTER PROJECT!

As Featured In

FAST COMPANY The Washington Post *the Atlantic* theguardian



CONTACT

Have a question that isn't answered here? Want to write your own piece about the project? Interested in collaborating? We want to hear from you!

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