

Tulane alumni reimaging glass recycling

May 03, 2022 11:30 AM Becca Hildner
rhildner@tulane.edu



Glass Half Full, a venture of Tulane alumni Max Steitz and Franziska Trautmann, is creating a new model for glass recycling in Louisiana.

Louisiana is losing land to coastal erosion at the rate of one football field every 100 minutes. According to Franziska Trautmann, an alumna of the School of Science and Engineering and co-founder of [Glass Half Full](#), it doesn't have to be this way. She recently spoke to Tulane's [On Good Authority](#) podcast about how Glass Half Full is endeavoring to increase Louisiana's climate resilience and disaster readiness by recycling its glass.

Trautmann and her co-founder, Max Steitz, started Glass Half Full in a backyard while they were students at Tulane. She credits Tulane's service-learning curriculum requirement as a foundation for their community-minded attitudes.

"It's (service) something that was really instilled in us since TIDES, where I did my first service-learning project. And so, I think that idea of working with the community that we live in and giving back to the community in some way shaped how we formed Glass Half Full and why we did it," Trautmann said.

In that spirit, their mission is to reimagine recycling as an inclusive community effort, where residents are active participants in the recycling process as well as beneficiaries of the recycled products. Residents can drop off their glass for free or arrange for monthly pickups, and when storms bring the threat of flooding, Glass Half Full distributes free bags of glass sand.

"We're constantly trying to get input from the community on things that they want to see. For example, our sandbag program for hurricanes, we often give away sandbags when a storm is approaching for those who need them. And we also do a lot of volunteer programs having to do with disaster relief or recycling," she said.

With over 2.2 million pounds of glass collected over the years, Glass Half Full will need to do more than distribute bags of sand. They hope to use the majority of the sand they create to help prevent coastal erosion, a major threat to Louisiana's communities and culture.

"We were able to partner with some of my old professors in the chemical engineering department, as well as Tulane professors in coastal and river engineering, ecology, biology, a ton of different experts in their fields...so asking the main question of 'can we actually do this?' and 'what's actually in the sand?' and 'is it safe to put in the environment?' All of that is going really well," she said.

The organization has been featured in countless major publications and frequently goes viral on social media platforms like Tik Tok. Trautmann believes the sizable interest in Glass Half Full is indicative of a new generation of eco-minded citizens.

"People have just loved it, which has been incredible to see. I think that speaks to how frustrated a lot of young people are with the lack of action on climate change and certain sustainability issues. And so, seeing other young people take action in our city, I think, has inspired a lot of people to take action in their city as well."

To hear the full discussion, listen below.