



Mary and Steve Schweinsberg in front of one of their split-body trucks that can collect both refuse and recyclable materials at each stop. Below: Mary and Steve Schweinsberg enter their Prairieland Recycling and Disposal business at 21988 N. Pepper Road in Lake Barrington.

Sorting It Out

A MADE IN BARRINGTON BUSINESS IS CHANGING THE WAY WE THINK ABOUT OUR WASTE

MARY AND STEVE SCHWEINSBERG met in junior high school and became high school sweethearts. They have five children and live in an unincorporated area near Barrington. Having a couple of acres at home was enough for the family to keep a pony for their children. “We had a mini-farm at home,” Mary said. “But as I saw the excess of manure going off to a landfill, I thought that was a shame.” Steve is an entrepreneur who has experience managing resources such as top soil, sand, gravel, and composting, as well as the trucks and equipment involved.

Mary says she is a “green” person at heart—influenced by her parents who grew up in the Great Depression—and everything she learned at home was about being resourceful and frugal. In her home, there was no waste. Mary rides her horse along with her girlfriends in Barrington Hills. When she saw a garbage truck hauling away the horse manure from a friend’s home, it bothered her, so she tapped Steve to find a way to offer residential organics pick-ups with one of his trucks. “Barrington is very social and networked, and word got around



quickly about our service and we expanded fast. Within two years the couple incorporated their newfound business as Prairieland Recycling and Disposal Services. “That was 16 years ago,” she said. Unique to their service then, and now, are their dual-purpose trucks that can make one pass at each stop for both organics and garbage.

GOING THE EXTRA MILE

Mary and Steve are in the business of educating communities, as well as handling their waste materials. It’s a step in the right direction—to shift recyclables away from being dumped in landfills and instead be repurposed into organic products for re-use—and local governments, including North Barrington and Oakwood



Composting Makes Sense

Composting organics reduces the amount of material that is landfilled and helps reduce greenhouse gas production. Compost and mulches are used to rebuild local soils, protect topsoil from erosion due to wind and rain, suppress weeds, conserve water and attract earthworms. The material you put in your bags and containers is used by organic farms, backyard gardeners, nurseries, landscapers, and public agencies.

PrairieLand's staff educates local governments and area residents about composting with the help of this storyboard, above. The composting process is detailed: food becomes food scrap, along with other organics, which is delivered to a state-licensed facility and kept in a neat pile; then it is ground up to increase its surface area which bacteria love; winter windrows are "cooking" and liquid cow manure is injected; micro-organisms help raise the temperature to over 140 degrees (which kills the bacteria and weed seeds) and the windrows blow off steam; the composting process is finished, the material is packaged as Organimix, and purchased for the uses noted above; and success: a 1010-lb. pumpkin grown in Organimix is shown.

PRAIRIELAND'S POLICY ON COMPOSTING

PrairieLand recycles home food and yards items, as well as horse manure and livestock waste on a weekly basis, year-round. Small containers are available to collect kitchen items, such as vegetable and fruit scraps, egg shells, tea bags, coffee grounds, pasta, rice, and bread. Items are collected in the small container (shown here) and frozen to avoid any smells. Other recyclables that are accepted are grass cuttings, leaves, garden waste, used cat litter, small tree trimmings and prunings, and sod. Larger bins are used for yard waste. Dumpsters can be used for animal waste and animal bedding. During October and November, PrairieLand provides the community with pumpkin disposals events (see website for dates).





Prairieland will accept your white goods and small appliances (anything with an electrical cord) at its facility. Pick-ups are available for a fee. If you are not sure about an item's disposal, call Prairieland first. There are various regulations from county to county.

Hills (in the Cary area) among others have become Prairieland customers. "North Barrington is doing very well with us," says Mary. "In the three years we've been hauling for them, their recyclables have increased overall by five percent. That's five percent of materials that didn't go to a landfill."

Prairieland will also accept used and worn-out athletic shoes at their Lake Barrington location. Just tie the laces together, put a rubber band around each pair, and drop them off. Those shoes are repurposed in various ways, depending on their condition. They also collect small flowers vases that are repurposed by hospice and other care organizations for patients to receive a gift of flowers. They also accept electronics—anything with a cord. The one thing they do ask for is for 'no fly dumping' which is not a fair transaction for them.

A GOOD START

Prairieland is a family business that is growing and with each new customer, helping the environment by educating people on the idea of recycling first, and throwing out last. "I know we are making a difference in Northern Illinois," Mary said. "When we go to our compost facility, it is only a five-mile loop, so we also limit fuel use by having our composted materials as they are not being hauled a long distance to a landfill."

The Prairieland business model is working in local communities with success. Today, there are people representing 11 municipalities, 40,000 homes served per week, and homeowners associations who agree. U

