

Champlain Business Journal -- October 2006 Spotlight on New Business



Earthgirl Composting

Households and businesses that can't or don't want to compost their food scraps, non-recyclable waste paper and yard waste on-site can now have them brought to the Intervale by Earthgirl Composting. Megan Kolbay uses her Subaru station wagon to collect these organic materials in the Burlington area and deliver them to Intervale Compost Products' compost facility in Burlington. Each customer is provided with five-gallon buckets for food scraps and paper. Kolbay picks up the filled buckets either weekly or bi-weekly, leaving clean ones behind. She also collects loads of yard waste and holiday trees.

Kolbay got the idea for her business in November of 2005 when a friend who doesn't own a car offered to pay Kolbay to collect her food waste and bring it to the Intervale. Her next customer, also a friend, hired Kolbay in December of 2005 for the same purpose.

Kolbay, the mother of a five-year-old son, has been composting her household food waste at home since she moved to Burlington seven years ago. In deciding what to charge for her services, she used research developed by the Vermont Joint Fiscal Office on livable wages in Burlington, which has determined that a livable wage for an adult and one child in urban Vermont in 2005 was \$18.55 per hour or \$38,590 annually. (A livable wage is defined as one that meets a family's basic needs and covers applicable federal and state taxes.) "I also figured out how many customers I could handle and what people would actually pay for the service," she says.

Earthgirl Composting charges residences \$10 for weekly collection, \$15 for bi-weekly collection and \$20 for monthly collection of one five gallon bucket of food and paper residuals and \$5 for each additional bucket. Businesses are charged \$12.50 per bucket plus a one-time start-up fee of \$20. The charge for a load of yard waste is \$20, and Kolbay charges \$15 per tree to remove holiday trees. Customers can pay either monthly or on pick-up days.

Simeon Geigel, a counselor at the Micro Business Development Program (MBDP) of Champlain Valley Office of Economic Opportunity (CVOEO) is assisting Kolbay in developing a business plan, marketing,

and applying for small business loans. MBDP is a statewide program providing services to individuals who own or intend to start a business. CVOEO's MBDP serves Addison, Chittenden, Franklin and Grand Isle counties. Its services are free to low- to moderate-income Vermonters.

Earthgirl Composting collects food scraps from two employee kitchens in Vermont Energy Investment Corporation's office building in Burlington and Seventh Generation's kitchen and cafeteria in Burlington. She also collects used paper towels and tissues from Seventh Generation's bathrooms.

Kolbay plans to expand her services to political events, "green" weddings, fundraisers, and other events. "My goal isn't just to make money through this business," she says. "I also want to make a difference. I love the idea of reducing the amount of waste going to landfills. Most households that are composting are just composting their basic food waste, because it's difficult to do more at home. They're not composting all the food scraps that they could, such as meat, bones, dairy, eggshells, or their non-recyclable paper waste like paper towels, paper plates, napkins, and pizza boxes."

Her future plans also include purchasing a collection truck that runs on vegetable oil, biodiesel or another alternative fuel. "I'm not going to get a truck that runs on gasoline, because that is contrary to how I live my life," says Kolbay. "I'm trying to leave a small footprint and a truck running on petroleum would leave a huge footprint."

The mailing address of Earthgirl Composting is 8 Blackwell Street, Montpelier, VT 05602. The telephone number is (802) 223-1271. The email is megan@earthgirlcomposting.com