

# Recycling In Georgia Means Business



Hardegree

By Gloria Hardegree

The Georgia Recycling Coalition launched a *Made in Georgia...from recycled materials* campaign last August during its 22nd annual conference. The project began with an EPA Region 4 grant to the Georgia Environmental Protection Division to map the entire recycling industry in our state. It caught the attention of economic development leaders who were looking for a tool to assist potential industry prospects looking to locate in Georgia with feed stocks for their product manufacturing, as well as for outlets for handling their by-products in an environmentally preferable and cost-effective manner.

A partnership was born! The goal of this collaboration with our coalition and two state agencies is to support economic development and to increase diversion of materials from landfills to the manufacturing sector based on the burgeoning recycling industry in Georgia. The map includes several layers of the larger recycling industry in Georgia including: materials recovery facilities, transfer stations, single stream hubs, composting facilities, etc.

The "end-users" or manufacturers portion is the key to "closing the loop" of the recycling symbol representing: collection, processing/re-manufacturing and buying recycled content—the focus of our campaign. To date, this layer of the map has identified more than 120 Georgia businesses that use recovered materials to manufacture a variety of recycled content products. These businesses rely on items such as plastic bottles, metals, glass, many paper grades, organics, carpet, and tires collected from residential and commercial recycling programs to use as raw materials in their process.

Georgia is known nationally for having the second largest recycled end-use market infrastructure in the nation and the largest in the southeast U.S. When you add the collectors who pick up the recyclables and the processors who prepare them for the manufacturers, the industry is larger than most think in our state. Georgia's paper industry recycles almost 8 percent of all the paper consumed in the US with 15 paper mills in Georgia using recycled content, eight relying exclu-

sively on recycled fiber.

One third of all plastic beverage containers recycled in North America get recycled in Georgia by the carpet industry. Novelis, one of the largest aluminum recyclers in the world, processes used beverage cans in Greensboro with its North American headquarters in Atlanta, and three manufacturers in Georgia use recycled glass to make new glass products.

Georgia cities are leading the charge in handling residential recycling collection and influencing commercial entities to ramp up recycling efforts in local communities. Recently Columbus opened a state-of-the art Recycling Facility & Sustainability Center in partnership with Pratt Industries, upgraded to larger curbside carts and implemented a *Recycle & Win* incentive based campaign with Coca-Cola Consolidated. The city of Atlanta improved its residential curbside with larger carts and a citywide *Cartlanta...get into it* campaign. Both Albany and Chickamauga have recently implemented the first curbside programs for their residents. Athens-Clarke County now has a mandatory commercial recycling ordinance and staff to provide technical support. And this is just in the last year; there are many more great examples of the growth of recycling access in Georgia.

That recycling is beneficial for the environment is mostly uncontested. What is becoming increasingly more obvious is that recycling contributes to the economic health of a state's economy. Despite the results of numerous empirical research studies to the contrary, skepticism regarding the economics and benefits of recycling persists. The benefit of recycling with regard to local economic growth and development, job creation, and increasing business competitiveness needs to be more widely known and more highly valued. What we have in Georgia is great opportunity to grow this industry toward the highest level of economic and environmental benefit for its citizens. We need your continued investment and support to take advantage of this unique opportunity.



**Gloria Hardegree is the Executive Director of the Georgia Recycling Coalition.**

**The Georgia Recycling Coalition (GRC) is the 501 c 3 state recycling organization in Georgia in its 23<sup>rd</sup> year of operation. Its mission is to promote & enhance waste reduction and recycling programs & activities in the state. GRC is comprised of members representing all sectors of the recycling industry. [www.georgiarecycles.com](http://www.georgiarecycles.com)**



**Hapeville's mayor and council are planning spring events for the city's recently renovated depot. In addition to the interior renovation and the plaza creation, the project includes sidewalk improvements, landscaping, a new water fountain and new lighting. The city funded the \$801,000 project with a Transportation Enhancement Grant and matching funds. On May 10 and May 24, the city will hold a Farmers' and Artisan Market. The city is also planning to re-open the Hapeville historical museum in the depot and a visitors center.**