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Recycling business sees lack of profits, not lack of materials

By Dionne Searcey
Staff Reporter

Paper, glass and aluminum are pouring into a local recycling business, but profits are hard to come by.

Terrie Asche calls herself a "volunteer" at Recycle With Michael, not an employee. She and

three other volunteers at the local recycling business have not been paid as partners since the business opened last June.

"We're doing this for nothing so far, but someday we're hoping it will all pay off," Asche said.

The three "dedicated" volunteers spend about four hours each day, she said, picking up pre-sorted glass, newspaper, ledger paper, aluminum, tin and plastics from about 400 local curbsides.

The volunteers sort each type of recyclable, then take the products to respective local outlets for processing.

The outlets, in turn, ship the materials to plants in other states that can turn them into usable products.

"It's a service of convenience," Asche said.

Customers don't have to take glass to one outlet, plastics to another, and aluminum to yet another, she said. The company does it for them.

When the business started, only 12 customers took advantage of the \$5 monthly pick up charge.

The company doesn't advertise, but word of mouth has caused business to pick up.

"We didn't want to grow too fast and not be able to handle it," she said.

But now, Asche said, even with about 400 customers the business is only "paying for itself." The company is plagued by many

problems common to the recycling business.

She said virgin glass costs \$40 a ton to make; recycled glass costs \$50 per ton to process.

And Recycle With Michael has to pay an outlet to process paper, Asche added.

She said plastic poses another problem. In the past, the company took plastics to the Citizens For Environmental Improvement, but the plant recently closed.

Asche said her company still picks up plastic from customers, and stores it in 500-pound bales until an outlet that accepts plastics is found.

"We don't want to end up throwing it in the landfill because we can't find anything to do with it."

And profits from aluminum outlets, she said, only cover operating costs.

"It's wonderful to recycle and everybody wants to do it, but right now, there isn't any cost effective way to do it."

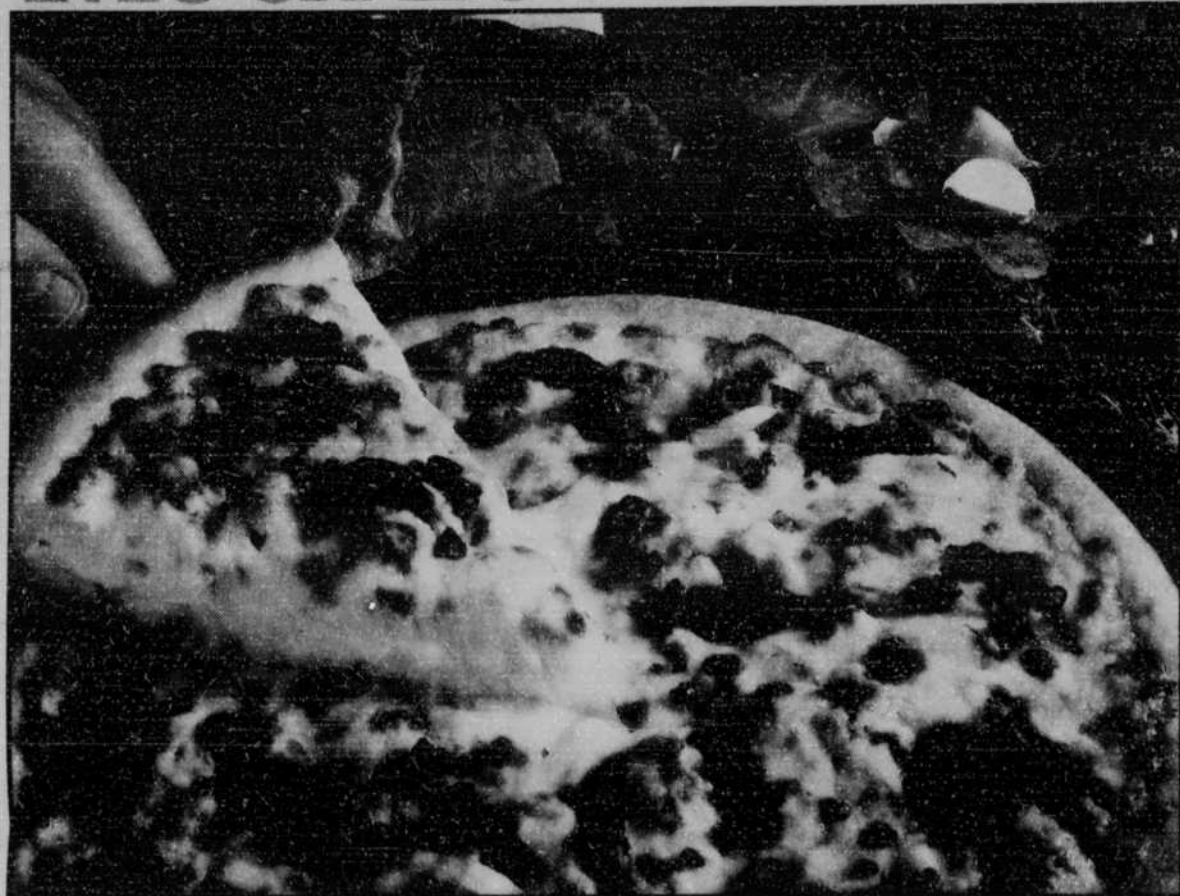
But Asche said she hasn't given up hope.

"Eventually, we'll hit the size we need and then there will be profits."

The company has already generated enough business to someday be able to "skip the middle man" and ship the recyclables themselves to manufacturing plants. This will cut down on de-

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William Lauer/Daily Nebraskan

Frank Birdsall, 7-foot 8-inch stiltman from Oak Park, Ill., hands out balloon toys to children during Earth Day celebrations at Pioneers Park Sunday, April 21.