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Mid America Recycling (MAR) began operations in 1979 in response to the passage of Iowa's Bottle Bill. During the height of the company in the late 2000s, MAR expanded to become the nation's largest privately held recycling company, with a value of \$200 million through recycling over 1.5 billion pounds annually.

## Mid America Recycling – Thinking Globally, Acting Locally

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ON 01/01/18

SPOTLIGHTS

### Thinking Globally, Acting Locally

Mid America Recycling (MAR) ([www.midamericarecycling.com](http://www.midamericarecycling.com)) began operations in 1979 in response to the passage of Iowa's Bottle Bill. During the height of the company in the late 2000s, MAR expanded to become the nation's largest privately held recycling company, with a value of \$200 million through recycling over 1.5 billion pounds annually.

Following some buyouts and name changes, the original MAR management team reunited to buy back the company and return it to a steady, organic growth path within its geographic footprint. With more than 200 years of combined recycling experience among company owners and management, you can rest assured that MAR will grow.

**Give us a brief overview of what your company does.** – MAR makes the process of recycling materials quick and easy. Our professional management, plant and administrative team has years of specialized experience in the recycling industry. We manage your resources so you can manage your business.

**How long have you been in Lincoln?** – Since April 1, 2014.

**Who are the owners/important executives?** – Ownership of Mid America Recycling is held between five individuals: Mick Barry, Brian Meng, Curt Lack, Robert Pickens, and Kelley McReynolds. Brian and Curt reside in Des Moines, Iowa. Mick splits his time between Iowa and Colorado, where he owns another recycling company. Robert lives in Oklahoma, and Kelley resides here in Lincoln.

**What do you think makes you different from other companies similar to yours?** – We have the industry experience of the "big guys" but we've maintained the personal touch that comes with being a locally-owned business.

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**What do you like about doing business in Lincoln?** – The people in Lincoln are great to work with – friendly and quick to help. We’ve developed several long-term relationships with customers, suppliers, and industry members. It’s nice to see the same faces year-to-year.

**What kind of community organizations/groups are you involved with?** – The Nebraska Recycling Council, Nebraska Safety Council and WorkWell, and the City of Lincoln’s “Become a Recycling Champion” education campaign on recycling.

**Do you have a business philosophy or mission statement?** – GSD (Get “Stuff” Done) is our motto. We closely adhere to all industry regulations while maintaining a lean workforce. We all work together to get things done in the most efficient way possible. In other words, titles are not very important to us.

**What is one of the biggest challenges that your company has faced?** – There have been several, but we’d all probably agree it was our first startup of a single stream recycling system. We started the project in 2006 with the intentions of purchasing new equipment, moving to a new building, and starting the new system on-time. A year later, the markets crashed and the economics of the project changed. We made it work in our existing facility with a combination of new pieces of equipment and a lot of refurbishing of an old system that was removed from a sister plant. That system is still efficiently operating today.

**What has been your most important achievement as a business?** – In February 2017, we retrofitted our existing single stream sorting system. Prior to the upgrade, much of the material separation was done by hand. In addition to equipment to better separate paper from containers and an optical eye to separate plastics by type, we added a Machinex 10-ton-per-hour Single Stream Machine (\$700,000 cost, 75 feet long, 10,000 square foot area – enough space for 5 to 6 houses). It increased our production capabilities from 1 ton per hour to 10 tons per hour. In addition to adding 5 full-time positions, this new equipment allowed the facility to nearly double its existing capacity.

**What was the biggest turning point in your business?** – We received a \$200,000 grant from the Nebraska Department of Environmental Quality for the single stream sorting retrofit just mentioned. Single stream – putting all recyclables into one container – is the future of recycling, and our new system opened the door for us to receive more single stream materials from Lincoln, surrounding communities, and businesses.

**What is the most unique or interesting thing about your business that most people don’t know?** – Mid America Recycling sorts, processes, and ships 1800 tons per month. End-users buy our recyclables to create new products. For example, an aluminum can goes from a recycling bin to a new can on a grocer’s shelf in less than 60 days. Your paper products most commonly return as paper towels, shoe boxes, cereal boxes, and shipping envelopes. Plastic containers are recycled into car parts, carpeting, and clothing. Glass is crushed, melted, and reformed into new glass bottles – and it never wears out!

**What changes have you seen in the industry and your company in the past few years?** – The biggest change is the explosion of online shopping and the impact that has had on the recycling industry. We are seeing far less cardboard from big box retailers and a dramatic increase in small- and medium-sized boxes in residential recycling containers.

**What do you see happening with the business in the next five years?** – We expect to see continued increases in recycling volumes as trash service costs and landfill bans increase. Communities are starting to realize that recyclables are not trash – they are valuable raw materials.

Education will become even more important as participation rates increase. “Wishful Recycling” (i.e. putting items in a bin that you “hope” are recyclable, but really aren’t) causes multiple problems at our recycling facility. These items that should be recycled elsewhere and/or disposed of properly are lowering the overall quality of the remaining true recyclables. Some recycling facilities are forced to landfill as much as 25-30% of incoming materials due to comingled trash.



UPCOMING EVENTS

« JANUARY 2018 »						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S
31	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31	1	2	3

**THU 11** **LIBA Bizco Biznet**  
January 11 @ 4:30 pm - 6:30 pm


**SUN 21** **Holthus Convention Center Hosting 2018 Bridal Show**  
January 21 @ 1:00 pm - 4:00 pm


**SAT 03** **Habitat for Humanity Hosts 30th Anniversary Celebration**  
February 3 @ 6:00 pm - 9:00 pm

**FRI 09** **Nebraska Builders Home & Garden Show**  
February 9 @ 1:00 pm - February 11 @ 5:00 pm

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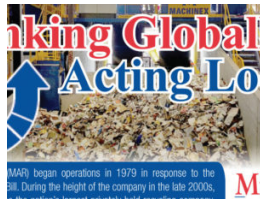
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