

T H E PROTECTOR

ELIZABETH GARRISON

Sometimes being a trailblazer means taking a chance. For Elizabeth Garrison, making a career move in a relatively untested market on her own home equity was worth the benefit it would bring to the Upstate. Today, she's the president of Ever Green Recycling, but along with all of the paper signing and executive decision-making comes less pleasant responsibilities—namely, a fair share of garbage collecting and transporting.

Garrison hasn't always been a trailblazer, although the influences that caused her to become one have been at work for many years. Initial career ambitions landed her in the field of broadcast journalism. However, after weighing the pros and cons of the industry and analyzing the competitiveness of the field, she decided to move in another direction—which led her to the first stepping stone in her path to becoming a trailblazer.

Garrison moved into pharmaceutical sales. It was during her seven and a half years in this field that she found the catalyst to her trailblazing work. Part of her job included entertaining clients, and during these times, she began to notice what was being thrown into the trash. "I really noticed what trash was going to the landfill, and it was valuable stuff," she remembers. The sight of this waste in addition to her background got the ball rolling for Garrison. "I'm from a farm in Anderson, and I think farmers are really great recyclers—composting materials that can be composted, reusing wood, reusing metal because you might be able to use it for welding," she explains. "We were always being very conservative with our resources."

Soon, Garrison moved on to economic development—all the while taking note of waste and recycling efforts in the Upstate. This new field left a definite impression on her. "I was so encouraged by entrepreneurs," she says. "They were doing great things: employing people, making dreams come true." Garrison continued to work in economic development for about a year and a half. After that, her ambition and inspiration took over, and she began a movement—and company—of her own.

"I took the jump," she says. Garrison walked the streets of downtown Greenville, testing the waters, seeing if businesses would recycle, given the opportunity and feasibility. "I started going door-to-door with businesses in downtown Greenville," she remembers. "I found hotels were interested, as well as a couple restaurants—Coffee Underground and Barley's." The desire was there; now, she needed a plan. She had discovered a business in North Charleston, S.C., Fisher Recycling, to build her business plan off of, and a mentor in the business's founder, Chris Fisher.

Having found a working business model to emulate, Garrison started Ever Green Recycling in the fall of 2007, in order to provide recycling capabilities to businesses in the Greenville area who were unable to do so themselves. "I kept my day job, hired somebody, and got a truck and trailer, and officially started picking up (recyclables) in November," she says.

The smell of empty milk jugs in her convertible was worth the good it would bring to the Upstate—and it continues to be, although the company now has garbage trucks. Her initiative encompasses both preserving the planet and developing business in the Upstate, but it starts with each individual and every business. "At the end of the day, I wanted people to think twice before putting something in the trash can," she says.

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

- 1995 Graduated from Clemson University with a degree in speech and communication studies
- 1996–1998 TV News Reporter at Northland Cable News, Seneca, S.C.
- 1998–1999 Marketing Coordinator and Sales Rep for Century BMW in Greenville
- 1999–2007 Pharmaceutical Sales Rep for Bristol Myers Squibb
- 2007–2008 Project Manager for the Greenville Area Development Corporation
- 2008–present Full-time Ecopreneur

While at BMS, Elizabeth won four Pinnacle awards which are given to the top 5 percent of the sales force.

- Professional organizations:
- Carolina Recycling Association
 - SC Recycling industry Group: Committee chair
 - Green Building Council; Greenville Branch
 - Greenville City Climate Committee

Elizabeth is also a owner/operator of the Denver Downs Corn Maze in Anderson.

Profile by Andrew Brandenburg

The facts:

700	Years before plastic bottles begin to decompose in a landfill
2,000,000	Tons of trash imported into S.C. each year
80	Percent of what Americans throw away is recyclable
28	Percent that is actually recycled