Ruth Lamb of Queensbury invites Warren County Supervisors to join community leaders and restaurant operators in attending a conference April 4 on organic materials management, which includes composting and recycling. Such strategies have been proven to reduce municipalities’ waste stream substantially, saving taxpayers money while producing high-grade soil enrichment materials and mulch products at a bargain price. The workshop, open to the public, is to be held from 8:45 a.m. to 12:45 p.m. at the state DEC regional offices on Hudson St. Extension in Warrensburg. Photo by Thom Randall.

**Area leaders to strategize composting of yard and food waste**

By Thom Randall

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QUEENSbury — Some communities in the Capital Region routinely offer free or low-cost compost and mulch for their local residents to use for landscaping and gardening purposes, and a coalition of citizens from Warren County would like to see it happen in their towns.

A coalition of community groups and individuals are seeking to encourage municipal composting of yard waste and organic materials, and a workshop and discussion session is planned for April 4 on the initiative.

They have cited that if adopted, local residents would benefit by having affordable garden compost and landscape mulch available, while area towns could reap revenue from those materials while obtaining savings from decreased hauling and disposal expenses associated with a reduction in their waste stream.
A variety of towns in the region already chip wood for various grades of mulch, but few if any in the region fully compost organic material to be used as a soil enricher.

Some area citizen activists would like to see the initiative go further, to include collection and composting of food waste from restaurants, supermarkets and school cafeterias, for conversion into valuable soil-enriching products.

These community activists have set up a workshop in Warrensburg on organic materials recycling and composting, intended primarily for town officials; public works superintendents; community leaders; restaurant, school and supermarket executives; and waste haulers in the southern Adirondacks. Also welcome are individuals who are interested in composting, recycling and waste reduction — and its environmental and financial benefits.

The conference and workshop is to be held from 8:45 a.m. to 12:45 p.m. April 4 in the state Department of Environmental Conservation’s Warrensburg regional offices on Hudson St. Extension.

Sponsoring the event are the Northeast Recycling Council based in Vermont, the state Department of Environmental Conservation, the Tri-County Transition Initiative, Warren County and the towns of Warrensburg, Lake George, Chester, Bolton, Queensbury, Hague, and Lake Luzerne.

Last month, Ruth Lamb of Queensbury — a member of the Transition Initiative, spoke at the Warren County Board of Supervisors meeting, asking them to participate in the workshop so they could hear first-hand about the benefits of organics composting and recycling, and to help strategize how to pursue the initiatives in the county.

“Great things are now happening in recycling and composting, but they just aren’t happening yet here,” she said after her presentation.

Athena Bradley of Northeast Recycling Council which conducts educational services in 10 states, said that comprehensive organics composting and recycling was the “wave of the future.” She said that three of these 10 states — Vermont, Connecticut and Massachusetts — already have instituted laws mandating composting and recycling of organics, and their requirements are now being implemented in phases. In the town of Brattleboro, food scraps are collected curbside alongside other conventional recyclables, and organic materials are composted.

In Vermont, large scale generators of food waste now have to divert such materials out of their waste stream to be recycled or composted, and by 2017 the law will require all households, institutions, restaurants and commercial entities to recycle their yard and lawn waste and food scraps and other organic material to be composted.

Bradley noted that a good number of supermarkets in the greater Glens Falls area are now having their vegetable and organic waste hauled away by a private composting operation.

Hearing that Lake George Village has an extremely high concentration of restaurants, she noted that an organized system of collecting food waste in the village would yield considerable benefits. Bradley said that composting of food scraps could include meat products including bones if the waste material is subjected to high temperatures.

Restaurants can save money by reducing their entire waste stream by as much as 80 percent, she said, noting that busboys, cooks and waitstaff need minimal training to separate organic waste for separate collection.
Also presenting at the upcoming Southern Adirondacks Organics Management Workshop will be Dave Mosher, director of a large-scale organics composting operation conducted by the Schenectady County Soil & Water Conservation District.

His composting facility operates on 15 acres of land and has an annual budget of $340,000 — offset by a similar sum reaped from selling compost, various grades of mulch as well as enriched topsoil.

This facility accepts loads of grass clippings and leaves, limbs, and other organics, as well as a limited amount of food scraps. They’ve been serving Schenectady-area households, businesses and institutions since 1980.

Their yard waste is ground up and bulldozed into 12-feet-high windrows. Occasionally, they sink food waste into pockets in these rows which are up to 300 feet long — and the material is left to compost naturally over 13 months or so. They chip and grind the wood products for various grades and varieties of mulch for landscaping. Much of the compost produced is sold as a soil enricher, and some of it is blended for high-grade topsoil. They sell the finished products to residents, commercial entities and landscapers at a bargain price.

Per year, this operation produces about 1,500 cubic yards of compost, approximately 1,200 yards of topsoil, and a similar amount of mulch, Mosher said.

“Schenectady County’s residents can beef up the soils in their gardens and yards and improve moisture retention, while we’re eliminating about 10 to 15 percent of the total waste stream,” he said, noting taxpayers and households are avoiding paying for costly landfill space and municipalities are extending the lives of their landfills. “At the April 4 workshop, we’ll be showing municipalities how they can mimic what we do, or just get an operation started. Composting is the future, and it’s good for municipalities to learn to handle organic waste and reduce their disposal fees.”

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The April 4 workshop will include a jaunt to the nearby Warrensburg town landfill, to look at the limited organics processing the town presently conducts there.
Town board member Linda Marcella has recently boosted the town’s recycling and sale of plastic waste, but she said this week more could be accomplished.

“We’d like to compost yard waste and food waste — perhaps see the town and school do something together — and end up with a usable, valuable product,” she said. "At the very least, it will eliminate the cost of disposal, and we’ll be giving something back to the taxpayers — while doing our part for the environment.”