The Madison County Solid Waste and Recycling Center had its origins in 1989 when a group of earth-conscious friends came together as volunteers to keep recyclables out of the landfill. Larry Karigan-Winter, now the Center’s director and one of ten who formed the original Madison County Recycling Coalition, and his collaborators spoke to the City Council and the Quorum Court about their vision for recycling in Madison County. They were given a 10 x 10 space in the County Road Department, and every Saturday a volunteer would oversee the collection of recyclables.

In 1990, new federal guidelines for landfills made trash burial more expensive and eliminated about half of the state’s landfills, making recycling more cost-effective. Karigan-Winter then formed a six-member task force that developed a solid waste and recycling plan and lobbied the state until they received the largest grant in Arkansas in November, 1991. Then-Governor Bill Clinton said simply, “Make it work.”

The current facility opened in November, 1993, as the only waste program in Madison County, providing disposal for all types of waste. In the 20 years from 1989 to 2010, the center recycled more than 16,624 tons of materials, saving Madison County $750,000 in landfill disposal and trucking fees. It paid citizens $2.5 million for their aluminum cans, metals and steel. Recycling has created 16 part-time and full-time jobs for county residents.

Most important, and a source of pride to the 15,000 people of Madison County, is that their two collection facilities for hazardous waste help keep the Beaver Lake watershed cleaner and safer. Seventy-eight percent of all land in Madison County drains into Beaver Lake. The Madison County Solid Waste and Recycling Center has kept 30,228 gallons of used motor oil, 35,934 feet of fluorescent light bulbs, 827,000 pounds of lead-acid (vehicle) batteries and over 240,000 pounds of paint, herbicides, pesticides, insecticides, solvents, thinners, PCB ballasts, oil filters, gasoline, household batteries, mercury, lead and other hazardous materials out of the Beaver Lake watershed.