

# Browns bag grocery shopping

## New service to ease running-to-the-store burdens

By Kathryn Almy  
Correspondent

Greg and Anna Brown are people you should know, especially if you find grocery shopping inconvenient or unpleasant. "Shopping is our bag" is the motto of their new business, the Grocery Shopping Service, which serves area residents from its base in the Browns' LaGrange home.

The service, officially in business since Jan. 9, is dedicated to providing high-quality, personalized grocery shopping and delivery service, which the Browns expect will appeal to working couples, senior citizens, and people who are ill or otherwise unable to go to the store.

Currently the Browns shop weekdays at the Plainfield Road Jewel and Osco in Countryside, making deli-

veries between noon-8 p.m. They provide customers with a detailed order form following the aisles of the Jewel. Orders can be placed at 106 Calendar Court, Box 121, or by phone. Soon they will be able to take faxed orders.

The service charges a small shopping and delivery fee scaled proportionately to the grocery bill and offers a senior citizen discount.

In their commitment to keeping the service small and personal, the Browns are not advertising heavily, preferring to serve a small customer base well and have their clientele grow gradually. They would like to be serving several dozen customers by spring, but first they want to work out the bugs. If something isn't right, we'll take it

back; we're not just a machine, they say.

For several years they had talked about starting a business, but might never have had the chance if Greg hadn't lost his job as a pilot for Midway Airlines when the airline shut down last fall. Although they are hurt by the sudden change and still have unresolved business with the airline, instead of dwelling on the problem the Browns are using the opportunity to do something they've always talked about.

"It's sort of a gift in a way," Greg says.

They started talking with each other and with neighbors about what kind of business they could run.

"We wanted to do something good and useful, some-

thing that serves people," he says. "And we wanted to do something where we can be independent."

Anna first came up with the idea for a shopping service. It seemed like something people needed, and it fit her interests.

"I like shopping, and I like cooking, so everything goes together," she says.

The Browns point out how their personalities and skills complement each other's, making them natural business partners. Greg is the organizer in the family, typing out order lists on computer and networking with area businesses and organizations. Anna, making a face at the mention of computers, explains that her skills lie in human contact. "I can't wait to get to know my customers," then she will enjoy making the business more personal, she says.

The Browns, who met and married in Italy when Greg was stationed there as a Navy pilot, really enjoy planning their business together. The service involves the whole family; their children, Lea, 9, and Erik, 7, help by stapling letters and order forms, getting 2 cents for every 10 they staple and an extra dollar every time they complete 500.

"They're very excited," Greg says.

Support is coming from outside the family, too. Greg has distributed order forms to be displayed at about 50 area stores, and says almost everyone he has talked to has given some business advice. The Chamber of Commerce has given him ideas and encouragement, and the LaGrange Memorial Hospital has offered to refer the service to patients.

At this time the Grocery Shopping Service is concentrating on the retirement-



home market: it has arranged to serve the residents of Windsor Place and is working on a similar arrangement at Bethlehem Woods. Greg believes the service will be more helpful to younger couples when springtime activities fill up their schedules. If they value their time at more than \$6 an hour, the service will free up their schedules so they can do more important things, he says.

Greg has met with Jewel manager Jim LaRocco to find ways to do the shopping more efficiently. Jewel will provide the service with a separate checkout lane and may give it a charge account in the future, as well as more detailed product lists to help customers.

In return, the service will help the store by efficiently shopping for four or five people (using a train of carts attached by bungee cords) during slow shopping hours. This will flatten out demand, lessening the number of people shopping during peak hours.

LaRocco says he is supportive of the service and thinks it will be successful because "I think he's got the right area for it."

The Browns' realistic attitude about the future of their fledgling business ensures they will succeed to some extent. "We don't know what's going to happen," says Greg.

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It has already been a learning experience, the Browns say, so no matter what happens, it will not have been a waste of time. Anna adds, "It's pretty exciting and fun just to create something."

Greg defines sufficient business success as having 15 to 20 customers and making some good, honest money, enough to cover expenses. "I know that will happen. I have faith," he says.

For information, phone 352-1550.