

Old-School Business Changes With The Times

By Suzanne Chessler



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Ninety years ago, when GLR Advanced Recycling was a one-man business just starting, it emerged with a focus that could be considered in many ways forward-thinking.

The idea of businesses and households establishing recycling routines — with bins for weekly pickups — would be far in the future of Henry Rosen, whose initial concern was collecting paper, cardboard and rags to sell for repurposing into useable products.

Now, with the celebration of a milestone anniversary, GLR Advanced Recycling fits right in with the times. Its network of eight locations, employing 150 workers, still collects and processes paper, but it has moved on to plastics, metals and electronics as factories advanced their products and people developed environmental sensitivities.

“We’re glad to be expanding sites around Michigan and will be creating more jobs,” says Michael Bassirpour, president and partner in the firm that merged GLR with his Advanced Recycling four years ago. “We use heavy equipment that dismantles, compresses, consolidates and cleans materials on their way for contempo-

rary uses and reuses.” In a world of social media, the firm also developed The Scrap Post (the scrappost.com), a website that allows users to buy and sell scrap, instantly connect with other members, get up-to-date scrap prices and news and search for materials of interest, in which Peter Karmanos and his private equity firm purchased an interest. The Internet connection has been described as the fastest-growing marketplace for scrap dealers, brokers and consumers.

“Our company’s growth in the last few years has been fairly dramatic given the challenges we’ve faced,” Bassirpour says.

As a result, we’ve refocused and built an all-star team that’s helped to integrate technology into what is an otherwise antiquated business. We’ve pivoted the model, kept working hard and tightened up where necessary as we find better ways to run the business.”

Rosen, a Russian immigrant, had served in the tsar’s army before fleeing Russia in 1905. He worked in the newspaper delivery business in St. Louis before moving to Detroit in 1927 and began collecting scrap.

The business grew as men, using

pushcarts to collect scrap metal in the alleys around industrial buildings, sold what they found to Rosen. At 17, Rosen’s son Ben joined the business by driving a truck route around the city to pick up cardboard boxes and rags, later bailed up and sent to paper mills.

By the 1940s, the company moved from Detroit to Roseville, and their growth continued.

Today, the firm recycles more than 100 million pounds of metal, paper and plastic and more than 40,000 cars every year. Annual revenues exceed \$75 million. The administrative team, growing out of a pioneering focus in the business, reports being part of a \$120 billion industry.

The company’s main office is in Livonia with metal yards in Roseville, Ann Arbor, Port Huron and Flint. They operate a paper, plastic and cardboard division in Northville and an electronic recycling facility in Oak Park. Those who sell to GLR Advanced Recycling include municipalities, businesses and individuals.

“Jews couldn’t find much work so they got in where they could,” explains Sandy Rosen, Henry’s grandson, now CEO and partner. “Many collected scrap because it was easy to get and easy to sell.”

Sister Ilene Rosen Bischer, also a partner, and Bassirpour are among the Jewish business owners who remain an important part of the industry’s present and look forward to future opportunities.

One way of moving toward the future has been purchasing scrap cars, which Bassirpour says helped keep his company afloat when hundreds of scrap businesses across the country were otherwise consolidated or shuttered.

“If you’re not working hard and not coming up with new angles and new

ways to work smarter than your competition, the competition will chew you up and spit you out,” says Bassirpour, a member of Temple Beth El. “That’s true no matter what industry you’re in.”

Bassirpour, who earned a business degree from Michigan State University, believes the success of the business has to do with the quality of employees. He has performed all the jobs in the yards, and while he is based in Livonia, he moves among GLR’s locations. He wants to relate to every employee as daily tasks are performed.

“We’re building a successful company because of the people we have,” he says. “We’re all obsessed with finding better ways to do business, and this also is an old-school handshake sort of a business.

“One way we’re keeping ahead of the competition is that we are willing and able to outwork, outsmart and outthrust all of our competitors. At the same time, we’re trying to keep Henry’s values — our community’s values — tied into what we do.” ♦



Ilene Bischer



Sandy Rosen



Michael Bassirpour



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