

IN BUSINESS

Transcript-Telegram



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Men of steel: A mound of scrap metal awaits shredding in the yard of Sullivan Scrap Company in Holyoke. From left, company officials are Bill Sullivan Jr., William Sullivan Sr. and George Sullivan.

Ain't no junk yard

Scrap metal is family's pot of gold

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In what William F. Sullivan refers to as the "horse and buggy days," his father would travel through the alleys of Holyoke, yelling for people to bring out their old rags and papers, which he would then recycle.

Sullivan points out that recycling in his father's days was not nearly as sophisticated as it is now.

For instance, employees at Sullivan Scrap Co. now drive large trucks to transport the scraps, which are mostly steel scraps from companies.

But despite technological changes that have occurred since Sullivan started the business in 1953 with his brother George, the recycling spirit remains. Both Sullivan and his son, Bill Jr., say the company is their life while Bill Jr. talks about continuing the family tradition with his cousin, Daniel Sullivan.

Describing the new machinery in his scrap yard, the elder Sullivan's voice booms.

"Did you see that one?" he asks a visitor, referring to a new guillotine shear, which performs the same function on heavy steel as it did on criminals' heads.

"It's a maneater!"

Sullivan then checks to make sure that his son has showed the visitor all the improvements.

Bill Jr., as he is called, doesn't have to be reminded. Walking through the yard, he first points out that it is nothing like a junk yard — which many people think is a synonym for a scrap yard. Nothing here is resold as the same item. It is all recycled.

Trucks drive through, overloaded with old dishwashers, refrigerators, radiators and just about every other discarded metal item they can seem to jam in. Sullivan said most of his

customers are industrial companies but there is more off-the-street traffic since recycling has become so well-publicized.

Danny Sullivan, whose father is George, said the publicity about recycling helps their business, but "there are some people who come in with one lawn chair and expect big bucks."

Mostly there are "the regulars." The truckers drive up to the small office, located in the middle of the scrapyard, and chat with Danny as he writes checks and weighs in each load.

The loads are separated by the type of steel. Items such as old barbecues, lawn chairs, car batteries and copper piping are thrown into different boxes inside a large building. Outside, piled high, are bundles of the same material compacted into dense packages, to be sent to a plant where they'll be melted down.

Prices range from approximately \$1.40 for a car battery to between 75 and 95 cents per pound for copper, and between 25 and 50 cents per pound for aluminum. Other items, such as dishwashers, are of little value as scrap metal and are disposed of free.

Sullivan Scrap is a "middleman" operation. They take metal scrap from companies and individuals, and then turn it into dense packages of like metal products that will be sold to various steel mills where it will be melted down.

And though environmental awareness has spurred business on one end, it has also diminished the number of potential customers on the other.

Sullivan explained that because of environmental controls that often increase costs, a number of steel foundries and mills have gone out of business.

But in spite of fewer mills to buy their prod-

uct, Sullivan Scrap has grown 50 times over — from a recycling capacity of 1,000 tons a year to more than 50,000 tons. They now employ roughly 25 people. And in terms of sales, Sullivan said their volume is "well into the millions."

And the Sullivans intend to continue reinvesting in the Holyoke company. Within the last several years, they have replaced two of the large machines used to compact steel.

In the far end of the yard is the newest machine, a large-scale compressor.

To demonstrate its efficiency, Sullivan has a crane operator pick up a dishwasher, light steel door and several other items and throw all of them into an open "hopper." Within a minute, a compact bundle comes out — no larger than a medium sized box that Sullivan said might weigh as much as 800 pounds.

He said the machine can compact more than 100 tons a day, a significant improvement over the old one.

The company also has had several other additions during the last few years, including the promotion of the younger generation of Sullivans — Bill Jr. and Danny — to management positions.

Bill Jr. has become involved in scrap recycling on a regional level as well. In March, he was elected president of the northern New England chapter of the Institute of Scrap Recycling Industries, Inc.

His father is still active in the company while co-founder George Sullivan retired several years ago.

The Sullivans also own Sullivan Steel Co., Inc. on Jackson Street, where they sell finished steel products — some made from steel that they originally sold to be recycled.