

STRONG TEAMS, GROWING COMPANIES

SIMPLE LIFE RECYCLING LLC A VESTED FOR GROWTH Business Champion



CHRISTINE CARRIGAN

WOODY BIGOS, FOUNDER

Woody Bigos grew up with nine siblings. To help put food on the table, he and his family combed nearby fields, with the farmer's permission, for unharvested potatoes.

"These leftover potatoes were waste to the farmer, but my father saw it as an opportunity," said Bigos. "That ethic always stuck with me."

Bigos founded Rochester-based Simple Life Recycling LLC (SLR) in 2009 with that same simple idea of turning waste into opportunity. SLR purchases manufacturers' metal scraps that are saturated with used cutting fluid. Its Re:cool fluid- and metal-recycling process then mechanically separates the fluids from the metal chips and reconditions it.

The fluids are then sold back to the manufacturer for reuse. The now-clean metal scraps are assayed for alloy content, compressed into briquettes and sold to the appropriate mill.

Bigos estimates that manufacturers throw away as much as 90 percent of their cutting fluids. Recycling them, he said, can reduce their fluid costs by 20 to 50 percent. Additionally, cleaner and higher-quality scrap metal fetches a higher price.

Coming up with the fluid/metal recycling idea was simple, but designing the process was anything but.

Using 7,000 square feet of space offered by Barrington's Turbocam International, where Bigos worked at the time, he took two years to perfect the process, which now has a patent pending.

"It was a tremendous advantage to have Turbocam's support," he said.

Bigos has succeeded in turning this waste stream into a revenue stream. He said revenue grew from \$750,000 three years ago to \$2 million in 2013. He said he expects 2014 revenue to double to between \$4 and \$5 million.

SLR's workforce has also grown, from Bigos and one part-time employee in 2009 to



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14 full-time workers today. Bigos anticipates adding another five to 10 employees this year.

His employees, he said, are "100-percent responsible for the company's success."

"Success is about people. Who you do it with is far more important than what you do," he said.

For Bigos, Re:cool's challenges and milestones are different faces of the same coin. Overcoming the hurdles in developing the fluid-recycling process became

his biggest successes. "Once we were past those, I knew we had it. I knew we could patent the process," he said.

Another milestone for Bigos was his transition from an operations focus to CEO. "I don't have to be on the shop floor as much. I can now focus on aggressively growing the business instead of the day-to-day," he said.

Bigos said his deep faith was another important factor in seeing SLR through the difficult development process.

"I believe that it is impossible to have faith apart from patience," he said. "You can have faith that some idea is going to work, but if you don't have the patience to see it through, it's more excitement than faith."

What surprises Bigos the most about SLR's success is the relative lack of competition. "Our competition is the status quo. Most manufactures simply throw away the fluids," said Bigos. "This has been a problem for years and is unsustainable. Nobody looked at the waste as an opportunity."

It is that ability to look at a situation with a different perspective that Bigos says is the most important lesson he has learned from his company's success.

"Don't listen to all the noise," he said. "If you're entrepreneurial at all, you have the eyes to see what others don't. Have conviction to see the opportunity, follow through, and persevere." ♣