

CARPET DIEM

CarpetCycle thriving by reusing product most throw away

BY BRETT JOHNSON

It's cheaper than taking it to the dump. How many companies say that about their services?

At CarpetCycle, it's just part of their sales pitch. And it's working.

The Newark-based company charges less of a fee than a landfill would to take discarded carpets that have been ripped out of residential or commercial facilities.

Once it has the carpeting, CarpetCycle extracts the little-known valuables that are tucked away inside carpeting — nylon, polypropylene, latex and calcium carbonate — and sells them to a broad spectrum of industries that use the materials, such as engineering.

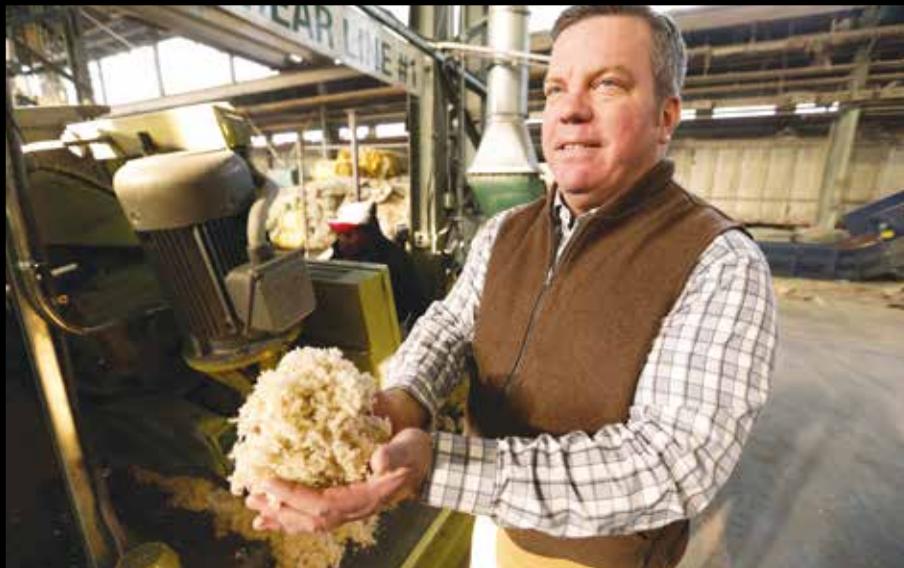
But unlocking these materials and turning them into profit requires that the carpets first come to CarpetCycle.

"Our company's biggest competitor is actually the landfill," said Sean Ragiel, CarpetCycle's founder. "Our end goal is to keep it out of (there)."

There's plenty of opportunity in this sector: Carpeting is a \$15 billion-a-year industry.

"Every home and business has some kind of carpet," Ragiel said.

But it's also true that every dump is home to carpet. Only 10 to 12 percent of



Founder and President Sean Ragiel holds a mass of sheared carpet at CarpetCycle in Newark.

discarded carpeting is recovered from landfills each year.

Ragiel, who formerly served as a logistics implementation manager for Waste Management Inc., witnessed for himself how much carpet that could have been repurposed for engineering materials was being carelessly tossed into the waste stream.

And that's why Ragiel got started back in 1999; he was mindful that there was treasure underneath his feet. His then Dover-based company saved 175,000 pounds of carpet from landfills in its first four months.

Since then, the \$3.6 million company has diverted more than 250 million pounds of carpet from landfills.

Still, 4 billion tons of carpet enters the country's waste stream each year, he said. And there's not many companies like CarpetCycle that are trying to change that.

Though there are some companies doing carpet recycling in the U.S., many only take certain materials.

Ragiel's Newark base is loaded with \$2 million worth of equipment, which extracts all types of materials from carpet. And the 55,000-square foot warehouse has the capacity to divert more than 4 million pounds of carpet each month.

It also has more than enough space to collect and recycle Armstrong ceiling

The biz in brief

COMPANY: CarpetCycle

FOUNDED: 1999

OWNERS: Sean Ragiel

REVENUE: \$3.6 million

EMPLOYEES: 43

ONE MORE THING: For the past two years, CarpetCycle has been collecting old carpet from the U.S. Senate Chamber in the U.S. Capitol in Washington, D.C.

tile (remember it from your grade school classroom?), creating another profit stream for the company. CarpetCycle has been named the nation's leading ceiling tile recycler for the past four years by Armstrong Ceilings.

Ragiel boasted that CarpetCycle is the only carpet and ceiling recycler operating, especially at this scale, in the Northeast region.

Because of its uniqueness, Shane Canning, a recent business development addition to the CarpetCycle team, doesn't find it too difficult to pique the interest of new clients:

"Everyone I talk to — they're surprised that this exists. That's including people who have been in the industry for more than 30 years. Their eyes light up when they hear about it.

"For me, being able to tell someone that their garbage has value is an exciting proposition. We take this material that was a burden to them and both save them money and keep it out of a landfill."

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Trash to treasure? It's hard to believe this is a commodity. —PHOTOS BY AARON HOUSTON

The toughest task is taking them apart

Once processed through CarpetCycle's system, carpet materials can be repurposed into engineering materials that end up in cars, clothing and even racetracks.

They just weren't made to come apart easily. Most carpets were not designed with recyclability in mind at all, Sean Ragiel, CarpetCycle's founder, said. He added that there's no magic

wand that separates the carpet's components into clean piles.

It takes machines, chemicals and manpower to harvest the goods and keep them separated.

"To make it a profitable business, we're harvesting all the value we can get," Ragiel said. "And it becomes a challenge of how clean can you get (these materials)."