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Aiming For Zero Waste

Conigliaro Industries, Inc.

Making a market in recycled products

By Micky Baca

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A lot of companies recycle computer paper, corrugated cardboard or soda bottles. But Conigliaro Industries Inc. in Framingham will also shred and recycle washing machines, 55-gallon chemical drums and even chocolate bars that have outlasted their shelf life. As company founder and President Gregory Conigliaro puts it, "...[O]ur whole thing is to be the total recycling service."

Conigliaro Industries' 450 customers around New England, New York and New Jersey can count on the company to take some 150 materials; grind, shred, cut up or bale them; and, in most cases, deliver them to other companies that will give them new life in other products. Today's foam cups might become tomorrow's packaging. Plastic petri dishes could emerge as video tapes. Plastic grocery bags could be transformed into plastic wood. Construction debris might blanket a grove of rhododendrons after being chipped into mulch.

In some cases, Conigliaro Industries manufactures its own products from recyclables, namely a foam packing it calls Polycorn. It also makes bean-bag and stuffed-animal stuffing. It also sells some cardboard boxes for reuse. Those products are only the beginning of what Conigliaro envisions will be a whole array of products his company will produce from various waste materials in the future. "Our goal is to make a product out of everything," he says. "That's vertical integration."

Conigliaro's disheveled office is in the heart of a run-down, 88,000-square-foot mill building constructed in 1905. One floor below, workers busily sort plastics trucked from hospital operating rooms, operate noisy machines that grind plastic and foam into mounds of granules, and prepare to destroy hundreds of faulty computer components fresh off the assembly lines but headed for recycling. Out back, rows of baled plastics and papers await transport via one of Conigliaro Industries' fleet of eight trucks and 45 tractor-trailers.

His is a complex business, Conigliaro admits. He not only operates a trucking and materials-processing company, he explains, but also "a commodity house." Like the stock market, the markets for the recyclable goods which his firm collects and sells are constantly fluctuating. These days, he says, soda bottles are down but milk bottles are up, and the paper market hasn't been the same since it collapsed in fall 1995.

On average, Conigliaro says, recycling with his company can save customers between 10 to 40 percent in waste-disposal costs. What's more, he notes, his firm helps its customers comply with ever-tightening waste regulations, protect the environment and reap the public-relations benefits of being more environment-friendly. Conigliaro Industries' key corporate goal is helping customers achieve a 100 % recycling rate. While some very large waste-disposal companies also do recycling, Conigliaro says he isn't worried about competition. For one thing, he says, few companies do the array of recycling and related services that Conigliaro Industries offers. His customers, he says, enjoy a sort of one-stop shopping when it comes to recycling. His company will do waste audits, collect and haul materials, educate employees and customers about programs, provide containers and machinery, track materials, and even design and install signage for programs.

The benefits Conigliaro Industries supplies to customers are a balance between savings in waste-disposal costs and peace of mind in complying with environmental regulations. To that end, Conigliaro observes, computers have become as important as shredders and grinders at the Framingham waste operation. The company supplies each customer with regular computer reports tracking the amounts of materials recycled, as well as recycling fees versus the prevailing waste-



disposal costs. Some companies, Conigliaro says, have reduced their Dumpster waste by 75 percent using his service. One firm, he notes, saved \$100,000 in waste-disposal costs last year.

Robert Daniels Jr., engineering manager for ECC Corp. in Holden, says his company realizes substantial savings by using Conigliaro Industries to recycle plastic barrels which it uses for chemical storage. The maker of printed circuit boards, which employs 130 people, had trouble finding someone to recycle the 20 to 30 drums it empties monthly at a reasonable cost, Daniels says. Using Conigliaro Industries has reduced the cost from \$10 per drum to between \$2 and \$3. Conigliaro Industries has made recycling economical for ECC, Daniels says. "I just think they're really conscientious, proactive, down-to-earth folks," he adds. "They're realistic, straight-forward and honest. They're not pie-in-the-sky folks."

Conigliaro Industries is always open to expanding its recycling horizons. "We've become known as the company who can handle any kind of material," he says. "We don't like to say 'no.' We say, 'Let's figure out if we can do it.'"

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