

BARC Finding Money in Mattresses

by Lynn Geiger

Instead of money *under* the mattress, one local businessman is betting on money being *in* it.

Andy Gale, who has built a successful nonprofit recycling operation out of many things most people consider garbage, is now taking mattress recycling to a whole new level.

This spring Gale purchased Michigan Mattress Recyclers of Gaylord with a vision to expand the service and to keep **Bay Area Recycling for Charities (BARC)** on its growth trajectory. It is the latest expansion for a company that started with just a pickup truck six years ago and is now leasing a 20,000 square-foot warehouse on Barlow and bringing all of its operations under one roof – now including thousands of used mattresses.

"It's time to merge all of our locations into one," says Gale of the recent move.

That includes its recycling operation in Maple City, eRecovery Michigan (formerly TC eWaste, purchased Feb. '14) at Chums Corner, its composting operation at the Grand Traverse Commons and now Michigan Mattress Recyclers (name change coming soon).

Gale founded BARC with little more than a conviction that much of the stuff filling dumpsters and landfills was a waste of good materials that could be repurposed – while diverting a portion of profits to local charities. BARC provides waste management/recycling services to both residential and commercial customers, as well as compostable products for events, businesses and households.

Recyclable materials are either sold to outside salvage companies, who then sell them into the post-consumer industrial market, or to the end users themselves.

"We see a pretty good future," says Gale, of the opportunities for selling mattress components. "It's good for BARC," which has nearly doubled its workforce to 17 since January and expects to add several more employees in the coming months.

While there are many mattress "renovators" in the marketplace – companies that put a new cover on an old mattress and resell – businesses that actually recycle the components are few and far between.

"No one in Michigan is doing it at this level," says Rick Chelotti, who started the company as a retail spinoff of his Sleep Shop store in Gaylord in 2011. Right now, 450 mattresses are coming in per week on the commercial side with plans to work out more relationships with local mattress providers.

While some states (on the East and West coasts) have laws against landfilling mattresses, Michigan does not. As such, his main competition is landfills, along with mattress "renovators."

When a mattress arrives at the warehouse, it is dismantled by hand and broken down to its basic components, explains Gale. In addition to steel and wood, six different fabrics – cotton, poly, shoddy, Dacron, the cover and coconut coir – are sorted, baled and ready to be sold.

BARC is selling the covers and poly fabric to a Pennsylvania company that turns it into carpet padding. Cotton is shipped down south to cotton producers; markets are being explored for the coconut coir – possibly for sheet composting – and the shoddy. One idea Gale has for the shoddy is blankets for use by moving companies.

"There are people out there who will buy almost anything ... you just have to find them," says Gale.