



Green Star International

Joe Mitchoff and Pierce Henley are ready to expand into the Gulf.

Carving a green niche

It all started with a pile of discarded wood found in a backyard. About four years ago, Pierce Henley and his wife purchased a house in the Portland, Ore., area. In the clearing behind the house was a pile of firewood. As Henley tells it, the stack was heavy, high-quality wood and he wondered where it had originated.

Upon further investigation,

Green Star International has found a way to keep vessel waste away from landfills

he learned that the previous homeowner had worked at the Port of Portland's docks and apparently would bring home waste wood for his fireplace.

The rest, as Henley and Joe Mitchoff, the founding partner and

co-owner of Green Star International say, is history. Out of that "pile of interesting wood," Mitchoff explained, the germ of an idea for a wood recycling business was born.

"We made contact and cultivated a relationship with the port and



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got a contract with the right people at Jones Stevedoring right away,” Henley said.

Both men feel they are on the cusp of the next great green thing that also stands to make them some money: recycling the wood dunnage, scrap steel and other waste items that arrive regularly from bulk and breakbulk vessels calling at two Port of Portland terminals.

“We’ve built the business through luck and tenacity,” said Henley, whose background is in construction. Mitchoff has a background in real estate and is a LEED Accredited Professional.

Green Star acts as a logistics intermediary between the port and recyclers through its contracts with Jones, waste-removal services and recycling firms. Green Star handles dimensional lumber, wood pieces, steel and steel cable, and actual

garbage, such as newspapers and bottles, from the ships.

Green Star uses subcontractors for the sorting and transfer to the recycling companies. It charges the stevedore for disposal. The wood, steel and other material is then sold to the recycling companies.

The company, founded in 2004, has partnered with Jones Stevedoring at Portland’s Terminal 6. “We find homes for everything that comes to us,” Mitchoff said.

Green Star recycles 99.5 percent of what is collected, he added. “Wood dunnage from ships is usually hauled off to a landfill because it’s so hard to get rid of,” Henley said. “That’s a tragedy.”

All ports have environmental mandates and waste-reduction goals, but many are lax in the implementation, he said, or they simply don’t know how to efficiently

factor in the recycling aspect of all that.

Mitchoff added: “The waste from vessels goes into bins — it’s simply garbage to them, and it’s difficult to recycle because it’s mixed waste.”

Pierce contends that no one but Green Star has a solution, “even though they might think they do, they fall flat on their face because they can’t handle the volume.”

Actual volumes are a tough number to ascertain, they say, but fairly large and growing. “Quite frankly, until mid-2008 our record-keeping for such incoming volume and type of material was unsophisticated,” Mitchoff admits.

He estimated that Green Star received about 3,800 tons of waste at Portland’s Terminal 6 alone last year — independent of another contract in Portland



Waste from ships goes into bins. Green Star acts as an intermediary between the port and recyclers.

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at Terminal 4. “Of that volume virtually all of it — 99 percent-plus — was permanently diverted from landfills by our finding higher and better uses,” Mitchoff said.

“Volume varies wildly by month based on the shipping schedules, but we have the capacity to accept everything our port contracts can send our way simultaneously thanks to our procedures and facility size,” he said.

“We take the time to find a home for the material,” Henley added. “It’s a multipronged approach; we have to control the front and back

ends to make it work. And we have to make sure that whoever gets the product gets it at a price they can afford.”

One company that Green Star has worked with on the recycling end is Evraz Oregon Steel Mills, which receives steel slab that arrives on bulk and breakbulk vessels.

Green Star set up the haul-off program with Jones Stevedoring and uses AGG Enterprises to divert the waste streams from Terminal 6.

The enterprise is in the black, though Henley and Mitchoff would not disclose actual numbers. “I

can tell you we have doubled our revenues each year for the past three years and are on track to do so again this year,” Mitchoff said.

“It took awhile before we could quit our day jobs,” he added. “We’ve saved our clients \$250,000 in disposal fees.”

Green Star currently operates solely in Portland. But Henley said the company can leverage the model and apply it to other ports, and that is precisely the plan. “We have a great idea of what needs to be done because we’re so steeped into this at this point,” he said.

“We are expanding to the Gulf Coast immediately,” Mitchoff said. “We are meeting with two major Gulf ports in October to determine the order of our expansion.”

The expansion focus is on the Gulf Coast, but Mitchoff said Green Star would consider “any port operator who contacts us to determine the feasibility of working with them.”

Green Star was able to succeed “basically through trial and error,” he said. “We’ve developed an operating model that can be scaled to other ports. We feel the time is right and our system is dialed in.”

“At least five other companies that we know of have tried this and failed,” Henley said. “We don’t see anyone coming in to do this right off the bat. We fill a specific niche — it’s profitable but not profitable enough for the big companies.”

They say one thing is certain: to make sure none of the material goes to a landfill or is used as fuel for boilers. “We sleep well at night knowing we’re doing something positive for the environment,” Henley said. ♦

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Green Star says it has enough capacity to handle everything the port can send its way.

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