

Contento Recycling: The Evolution of Sustainability

While the term sustainability is commonly used in 2019, in 1950, it was sparsely uttered. To understand how Contento Recycling LLC became Central New York's leader in sustainable development, you must go back to Gerald Contento Sr, and the year 1950. This was the year my grandfather started our family's vehicle dismantling and scrap metal recycling business. Over the course of the next 70 years, Contento's and now, Contento Recycling, has evolved into a leader in recycling and environmental work in Central New York. To see how I created a sustainable business enterprise, you must analyze my family's past. My family's history provides a roadmap to a more sustainable future.

In the 1940s and 1950s if you pulled the nails out of a used 2x4 piece of lumber it was probably because you were poor, or you grew up in a depression era where you were truly impoverished. Now, in 2019, I find myself doing the same thing, but for very different reasons. Now, I pull the nails out of a used 2x4s, similarly to how my grandfather did, but I do it not because I am impoverished, but because over the last 100 years, we have polluted our environment and starved it of the natural resources humans need to survive.

When I established Contento Recycling LLC in 2017, it was poised to be Central New York's first ever construction and demolition debris recycling business. I was tasked with the challenge that many sustainability professionals are tasked with and that was to show the community why they should stop taking their construction debris to the landfill, and instead bring it to my recycling center for processing, recycling, and landfill diversion. Over the last several years I applied for state grant funding, spread awareness about my new business, designed and constructed a material recovery facility, outfitted equipment, and trained staff. I now have a facility that accepts about 40 tons of mixed C&D debris per day, and diverts about 20% of that from the landfill.

While I have now set myself up well for the future, I remain hungry and focused on sustainable growth. I wanted to accept more material, recycle more, and divert more. In the next 5 years I will continue to preach sustainability to my community and expand my sphere of influence. Eventually, I will cement myself in the Central New York Community as the champion of sustainable development.