

DIRT TALK

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OXFORD RECYCLING

How this pioneering
Colorado company
overcame challenges
to succeed as a
material supplier

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John Kent,
Owner/President

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A SALUTE TO A POWER MOTIVE CUSTOMER

OXFORD RECYCLING

How this pioneering Colorado company overcame challenges to succeed as a material supplier



John Kent,
Owner/President

When Francis Kent opened Oxford Recycling on West Oxford Avenue in Englewood back in 1979, it was the first construction-related recycling facility in Colorado. Being first is often a good thing, but it also brings unique challenges.

"In the beginning, our job was more about selling the concept of recycling than actually recycling material," recalled Francis' son and current Owner/President John Kent. "We had to explain to road builders, demolition contractors and others what recycling was and how it would benefit them. On the intake side, it was a fairly easy sales pitch — bring your concrete waste to us because we're half the cost of dumping it in a landfill, with a side benefit being it will help extend the operational lives of our landfills.

"The bigger challenge was in getting contractors, municipalities and the DOT on board in buying and using our recycled product on their jobs," he noted. "They were accustomed to buying quarry material. That's what they'd always done. This was new and different, and people are often hesitant to try new and different. So we fought a bunch of battles to prove to them

that our product was as good as, and in many ways, superior to, quarry material."

Thankfully, Kent says, those days of having to constantly sell the idea of recycled construction materials are mostly gone. "Recycled products are now widely accepted, and often specified, especially by the DOT and municipalities. Everybody today understands that our products meet and exceed spec. They also realize that recycling helps the environment (longer-lasting and safer landfills, energy savings compared with mining, conserving finite natural resources). But those benefits alone don't bring us many customers.

"For most road builders and other contractors, construction is a bottom-line business, and their bottom line is determined largely by price and service. Generally speaking, I'd say we're always price-competitive and usually less expensive than the competition. And when it comes to customer service, that's where we believe we really shine. Our customers want a quality product, delivered on time, every time — and that's what we try to bring to the table for them."

Concrete, asphalt and wood

Originally, Oxford focused solely on concrete recycling. It added asphalt recycling in 1982 and wood recycling in 1998. Through the years, the company estimates it has recycled more than 3 million tons of concrete, 2 million tons of asphalt and 1 million yards of wood. The company, which has been involved in jobs both large and small across the Front Range (from Interstate highways to residential driveways), offers a long list of products and services.

"On the concrete side, we have a roll-off service for C&D waste; we have a large fleet of trucks to both pick up and deliver material; and we offer several different sizes of high-quality construction rock for a number of uses," said

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Scan this QR code using an app on your smart phone to watch video of Oxford Recycling's machines at work.

Oxford Recycling owns two Morbark 1300 tub grinders for wood processing, including this new one that the company used late last year to clean up storm damage in Wheat Ridge.





This Oxford Recycling operator uses a Komatsu WA500 to load recycled asphalt into a truck. "All of our Komatsu machines (four wheel loaders and an excavator) are productive and reliable," said Owner/President John Kent. "We've been loyal Komatsu users for close to 20 years now. Other suppliers have brought out machines for us to demo, but my operators say, 'No thanks.' They all prefer Komatsu."

Kent. "Significantly, we also have enough crushing capacity (800 tons/hour) that we can produce 'on demand,' which is important on many large jobs where the contractor prefers a single-source supplier but doesn't want to worry about running out of stockpiled material.

"On the asphalt side, we have an asphalt plant as a tenant on our property here, so they use our recycled asphalt in hot mix. We also sell recycled asphalt as-is to cover dirt roads and driveways out in rural areas. This reduces dust in the summer and, when it hardens, makes it much easier to plow in the winter."

When it comes to wood products, Oxford Recycling creates mulch, soil and compost at the plant. The company can also bring a tub grinder on site to recycle wood at a customer's location, which it recently did to help municipalities in the Denver area clean up after a big storm.

Talented, hardworking crew

Today, Oxford employs 17 people. General Superintendent Eddie Simons oversees plant production and maintenance. "We've got an excellent crew — talented and hardworking," said Kent. "Everybody knows where to be and what to do, so I don't have to micromanage the operation."

Several years ago, Kent took steps to downsize Oxford with an eye toward improving efficiency. "I did this a year or so



Oxford Recycling uses this Komatsu PC350LC-8 excavator, equipped with an NPK crusher, to pre-size concrete.

before the financial crisis hit in the fall of 2008. I didn't necessarily see that coming, but looking back, I'm very glad I acted when I did. It helped us survive the worst of the recession, and last year, even though the economy still hadn't come all the way back, we had a record year."

Beyond solid management, another factor in Oxford Recycling's favor is the fact that Kent is, in his own words, very picky.

"If you bring material to us, we demand that it be clean. No trash. And if you co-mingle material, we're going to charge you extra because we then have to separate it out. We're like a computer in that respect — if you put garbage

Continued ...

Future looks bright at Oxford Recycling

... continued

in, you're going to get garbage out. The fact that we are so picky is a large factor in our ability to consistently produce a high-quality product, which in turn, is why our customers know they can buy from us with confidence."

Loyal to Komatsu and Power Motive

Wheel loaders are the primary machines needed to run a recycling plant, and Oxford Recycling has been a loyal Komatsu wheel loader user since the mid-'90s. "After buying our first Komatsu from Power Motive, we've never had reason to buy anything else," said Kent. "We have had other suppliers bring out machines for us to demo, but my operators say, 'No thanks.' They all prefer Komatsu."

Oxford has four Komatsu WA500 wheel loaders and each has a job (feeding concrete, asphalt, wood or loading outbound trucks). The company also has a new Komatsu PC350LC-8 hydraulic excavator with an NPK crusher to pre-size concrete.

"All of our Komatsu equipment is productive and reliable," said Kent. "I want machines that go to work and run every day with minimal hassles, and my Komatsus do that. I don't want to run a big maintenance crew, so I tend to trade them in at about 9,000 hours. I know there's still lots of good life in them at that level, but I also know that's when problems can start cropping up, and frankly, I want to avoid those as much as possible. For me,

owning equipment is all about the consistent production you can get from it."

In addition to the Komatsu units, Oxford also has two Morbark 1300 tub grinders from Power Motive, including a brand-new one purchased late last year. "The Morbark is an outstanding wood grinder," said Kent. "I've looked at all the competitors and it has the best production numbers. It's very fast and produces an excellent product."

While he's loyal to both Komatsu and Morbark, Kent says a big reason for that loyalty is Power Motive.

"Power Motive gives us the support we need to be successful — period. Whatever it takes. Our salesman Jeremy Lapar is helpful in every way. Their service and parts departments respond quickly and efficiently. And Power Motive management goes out of its way to make sure we're happy — once going so far as to replace a problem wheel loader with a brand-new one. We came to an agreement that made sense for everybody and there was no argument and no haggling. They wanted to make it right and treat me fairly. That's the type of relationship we have with Power Motive, and I really appreciate it."

Optimistic about the future

Despite a challenging few years for the construction industry, in Colorado and the entire U.S., Kent says he's positive about the future.

"Certainly the economy is better than it was, and I'm optimistic that it will continue to improve, both here in Colorado and across the country. We still have a vibrant country with plenty of talented people. We've led the world for the better part of a century, and I think we still are the world's leader. Do we have issues? Sure, but I think they are all fixable.

"As far as Oxford Recycling goes, I'm optimistic about our future as well. Unlike the early days, people now know who we are and what we do, and they accept recycled products as an equal to mined products. I also believe our business is still growing. Fortunately, we're in a blessed position right now to be busy, so we don't have to take on something just to have a job to do. Nonetheless, we will continue to look for opportunities and for niches where we can fill a need and be successful. Our customers and the marketplace will determine what that is." ■

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Scan this QR code using an app on your smart phone to watch video of Oxford Recycling's machines at work.

(L-R) Power Motive Sales Rep Jeremy Lapar works with Oxford Recycling Owner/President John Kent and General Superintendent Eddie Simons on equipment matters. "Power Motive is a great partner," said Kent. "I really appreciate the relationship we have with them."

