



Old junk into evergreens

Two LI salvage yards go green on a global level *by Gary W. Wojtas*



Bob Giglione

▲ Paul Albarano: For the owner of Medford Auto Wreckers, recycling is a family affair.

Standing outside Medford Auto Wreckers, the view from Peconic Avenue is pristine, with a small parking lot surrounded by several well kept buildings and a fence. From that vantage, few would guess that a bustling and diversified recycling business exists behind those buildings.

But entering the 10-acre yard you find a car fanatic's wonderland of tens of thousands of neatly organized and soon to be recycled car parts, along with 2,200 wrecked cars of every make and model.

Owner Paul Albarano has been around this business for as long as he can remember, and has seen it all. It's in his blood, he'll proudly tell you. Started in 1964 by his father and

uncle, "auto wrecking" or "auto salvage" or plain old "junkyard," are terms he's fine with. And speaking of blood, the business, which employs 20, remains in the family.

But another term has now come into favor for the hard, lucrative, and grimy work of a junkyard: "Green business."

Ninety percent of Albarano's business is purchasing wrecked cars at auction and reselling the parts. His customers are individuals, body shops, mechanics and auto parts stores and re-sellers, who want to save money and need very specific parts.

While the bulk of Albarano's business takes place on Long Island, he works with customers throughout New York, New Jersey and Connecticut. Thanks to a high-tech parts tracking system, rarer parts are shipped throughout the country.

The junkyard business, Albarano said, was

a pioneer in recycling. "People may not have known it at the time, but for as long as there were junkyards, auto parts were being recycled," he said. "When we get a 'new' car in our lot, we hope to sell as many of the parts as possible. From the entire engine, to a tail-light, to the hood ornament on a Cadillac and everything in between."

Once the car is stripped of its usable and sellable parts, or a newer version of that car comes into Medford Auto Wreckers, the "carcass" of the older unit is removed from the lot. In years past these discarded cars would be reduced to a three-foot by three-foot block of compacted material and potentially doomed to a landfill.

Because of environmental concerns, dwindling landfill space, and the value of a car's steel, these carcasses have a new, green life today by being sold for scrap metal. In fact,

for Albarano, most of his discarded units only have to be shipped a mile east on Peconic Avenue to Gershow Recycling. "Instead of compacting, Gershow buys the cars from me and shreds the metal and then re-sells that product," Albarano says.

The year 1964 was an auspicious one in the auto parts industry on Long Island, especially in Medford. Just like Medford Auto Wreckers, that year Gershow Recycling was founded by Sam Gershowitz. Early on Gershowitz geared his business much more around scrap metal than specifically about auto parts, and would even "mine" Long Island's landfills, removing discarded vehicles for scrap.

Fifteen years later, Gershow established the region's first shredding machine, revolutionizing the way metal is used and re-used. While today Gershow, another family business, recycles pretty much anything made of steel, other metals, paper and even plastic, about 50 percent of its business comes from shredding cars.

"We buy from auto wreckers, bus companies, building contractors and the like," said current Gershow president Kevin Gershowitz. "We recycle appliances, building products, plumbing supplies, basically anything made of metal," he said.

From its modest beginnings in 1964, the company has grown to 750 workers at eight facilities on Long Island and Brooklyn. It owns the only metal shredder of its kind on Long Island.

The shredded steel produced in Medford is shipped, mainly by rail. But Gershow controls that as well, with its 250 rail cars on tracks adjacent to its plant. Recycled steel goes to all parts of the country and is also traded globally, exported to emerging economies such as India, Turkey and China.

Gershow's focus on supporting recycling and greening the environment is part of company culture, Gershowitz said, with employees speaking at local schools about the importance of recycling and letting the public know the metal scrap they shred and produce doesn't clog landfills. The value of metal is such that it is an extremely valued commodity. "Just think if you put some metal at the curb for garbage pick-up, chances are it will not be there in the morning," Gershowitz says.

He added that Gershow's recycling methods not only cleans up and lessens the environmental load on landfills, but lowers pollution levels.

On many levels, Long Island gets greener every time a wrecked car travels its last mile from Medford Auto Wreckers through the Gershow shredder.