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Familiar WATERS

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in the South Florida market.



Familiar

BY ADAM REDLING

WATERS



PHOTOS BY ASHLEY PANTANO PHOTOGRAPHY



Brendon Pantano's industry experience and strategic partnerships have helped launch Coastal Waste in the South Florida market.



Brendon Pantano was no stranger to the waste industry when he helped found Pompano Beach, Florida-based Coastal Waste and Recycling in August 2017 as its first CEO.

As a third generation descendant of Fredonia Sanitary Services founders Horace and Dennis Pantano, Brendon grew up in the business. Fredonia Sanitary Services, which was a Fredonia, New York-based waste hauling company started in the late 1950s, was sold to Browning-Ferris Industries (BFI) in 1985.

As his family stayed part of the business, Pantano says he grew up getting an education on the ins and outs of all aspects of what goes into running a waste operation.

"I remember early mornings and late nights working with my dad, Dennis Pantano, who always ensured the job got done and that the customers were always serviced no matter what it took," Pantano says. "Whether it was filling in on Saturday or Sunday on rear-load routes, cutting the grass at the facility or making the early morning runs in the tractor trailer to the landfill, I was taught that hard work would always pay off. I took advantage of the opportunity to work in all areas of the business."

It's this experience that gave Pantano his perspective on how each cog of a waste operation is fundamental for running a successful business.

"Having the opportunity to work around my family business as a young kid really shaped the leader I am today. ... I think it was that firsthand interaction with all the different people that it took to make a garbage business work and the stressful nature of so many of their positions that really made me appreciate the value of taking care of your people," he says.

After college, Pantano branched out to other waste companies, holding positions of general manager at Regus Industries, VP of operations at Environmental Logistics Services, district manager of Progressive Waste Solutions, and landfill manager at Waste Connections.



While Pantano was able to oversee a variety of different operations and lines of business throughout the progression of his career, it was his time at Waste Connections that got the attention of Buffalo, New York-based Summer Street Capital Partners when the private equity firm was looking to enter the South Florida waste market in 2017.

Pantano says that unlike a normal private equity-backed project where the owner seeks funding, the partners at Summer Street were the ones who initially saw the opportunity in the South Florida marketplace and tabbed Pantano as the leader they wanted in charge of the business.

“Due to several large consolidations, the market was lacking an independent that had the capital and experience to make a meaningful play in capturing some real market share,” he says. “They found me. I had previously been in the Florida market with Waste Connections. In their discussions with others they knew in the industry in Florida and the Northeast, they heard my name mentioned and ultimately felt my experience and reputation as an operator could be one that would bring value to a startup project like this.”

While Summer Street may have initiated the interest, Pantano says after a brief introduction, the compatibility was clear for

both parties.

“Summer Street has investments in many types of business, but my partner Brian D’Amico, [who is the managing partner at the company], had a huge amount of experience in solid waste,” Pantano says. “We shared the love of the industry, had many common connections in the industry, and ironically, they are based in Buffalo, my hometown. It appeared to be a perfect fit and has turned out to be a great partnership. After several months of discussion, we decided to get started.”

GETTING OFF THE GROUND

Pantano and his partners at Summer Street wasted no time in building up the company’s credentials. Within a year of commencing operations, Coastal completed four acquisitions across the Southeast Florida market, including Nu-Way Recycling in Martin County, Aquarius Recycling and Thoroughbred Waste in Palm Beach County, and Mammoth Recycling in Broward County.

According to Pantano, Summer Street’s M&A expertise helped set the stage for the company’s rapid growth.

“My partners bring so much strength to the table through their waste experience, success in mergers and acquisitions and the

strong ability to raise capital,” he says. “They advise and coach in areas that complement and strengthen my operations and leadership skills without interfering in the day-to-day operations.”

Today, the company employs over 250 people, operates over 100 trucks, and owns and/or operates nine facilities in the region, including two Miami-based transfer stations, three maintenance and truck facilities, and four material recovery facilities (MRFs).

The company’s customer base includes a mix of residential and municipal collection, industrial collection, commercial collection and post-collection processing contracts.

Specifically, its residential and commercial franchise customers include:

- Miami Dade County residential curbside recycling collection, which represents more than 225,000 homes,
- City of Hialeah residential curbside recycling collection, which represents 38,000 homes,
- Unincorporated Broward County residential and commercial franchise customers, which represents 4,200 single-family homes and 250 commercial accounts,
- The Town of Loxahatchee Groves, which represents 1,500 single-family homes and 100 commercial accounts,



- City of Bay Harbor Island residential and commercial franchise customers, which represents 2,750 residential and commercial accounts,
- City of Fort Lauderdale residential curbside recycling collection, which represents 38,000 homes, and
- The recycling collection contracts for the Miami Dade, Broward and Palm Beach County school districts.

Due to the synergies, experience and diversified expertise between Summer Street and company management, Pantano says that Coastal has been able to make decisive inroads steadily building up its customer base.

“We have the ability through capital and talent to execute on opportunities big and small,” he says. “We have been able to build a reputable company that came to scale quickly, allowing us to participate effectively in the opportunities available. We have successfully been awarded several residential and commercial franchise contracts and have made some great acquisitions that will ultimately build us the resume we need to compete for these larger franchise opportunities in the future.”

BATTLING THE BIGS

Although Coastal has been quick to carve out business in South Florida, being a smaller fish entering crowded waters does come with its share of obstacles.

“Every market has challenges. In our market, there has been so much consolidation over the past five to 10 years, and the larger companies have taken a foothold,” Pantano says. “I would say that is the major challenge, but one that can be overcome in time. Many municipalities have franchises in place that make it difficult to grow some business lines. Exclusion in the bid process comes through onerous, and often illogical, qualification requirements that often impede competition and result in higher pricing and, quite often, lower quality of service for the consumer.”

It’s this point—the opportunity for Coastal to offer better service in some markets—that Pantano says the company is looking to capitalize on.

“Strong customer service executed by people who are proud of what they do [is what I think sets Coastal apart],” Pantano

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—BRENDON PANTANO, CEO, COASTAL WASTE

says. “Going back to my earliest experiences and the strong respect I gained for what it takes to do each job, our culture is one that places value on everyone.

“We do not care about titles and positions, but on the actions of our people. We ask our people to perform their jobs, give them the proper tools and equipment to do the job and hold them accountable to be better than our competition—the organic growth of our business is a testament to a customer base that is seeking that personal service and attention to detail, and they’re finding it at Coastal.”

SLOWED, BUT STEADY

Pantano says that the strong foundation and dedicated customer base the company was able to build in its first couple of years in business has been instrumental in helping Coastal not only stem the tide brought on by COVID-19, but also align the com-

pany for near-term expansion.

“Being in a market that is affected by hurricanes, we understand the need to be prepared for the worst,” Pantano says. “Each department head became laser-focused on every line of business [when COVID outbreaks started occurring], and we tightened our belts being mindful of any loss in revenue and our abilities to make up that loss.”

He says that despite the losses in its industrial and commercial lines of business experienced since mid-March, the company’s post-collection operations picked up steam and allowed Coastal to gain market share. This led to the company increasing its headcount while other area waste companies were downsizing staff and reducing hours.

“We have certainly become an even better-operated company by learning to manage through this,” Pantano says.

The lessons gleaned from negotiat-

ing the pandemic are sure to be put to quick use, as Pantano says the company is poised for its next stage of growth.

“We are always planning for big growth, and although COVID has slowed our M&A activity for 2020, we continued to seek out opportunities,” he says. “We have a couple of near-term acquisitions teed up and continue to capitalize on organic growth opportunities as these come up. These opportunities will take us into other geographies in Florida and will further strengthen our position as a strong independent option to the ‘big guys.’ We are a well-funded company and have positioned ourselves to be an attractive buyer for other waste business in our markets and others.” **wt**

The author is the editor of Waste Today and can be reached at aredling@gie.net.



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206 S. Kentucky, Suite 206, McKinney, TX 75069 USA
www.grnmckinney.com

