

News:

Ellicottville company treading new ground

By Rich Place
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When people dispose of used tires, they most likely follow the old adage "out of sight and out of mind." But used tires - all 18 to 20 million per year in New York State alone according to the Environmental Protection Agency - have to go somewhere.

Re-Tread Products Inc., a young company based in Great Valley, is in the process of creating a new and innovative use for old tires. Led by company founder Tom Hansen, a recently patented idea called Tire Logs could be the future of recycling tires.

The concept itself is quite simple. Like wooden logs used in a log cabin, Tire Logs are long, snake-like pieces of recycled tires. Flat on the top and bottom and rounded on the sides, Tire Logs can be stacked in a variety of shapes for many different purposes like flood and sea walls, erosion control or foundations and walls for homes in earthquake-prone areas.

The idea for Re-Tread Products began about six years ago, when Hansen was brainstorming ways utility poles could be safer. He came up with the idea of "tire poles" - utility poles made out of recycled tires with a fiberglass casing for stability. The result would be a pole that is as stiff as wood but more energy absorbent if hit by an automobile.

Hansen made a prototype out of bicycle tires and applied for a grant to continue the process.

"I got rejected," he said. "The utility pole itself is a tough application. A lot of questions came up in people's minds about whether it would work and if others would buy it. I understood that."

But in the process of making the poles, Hansen realized that if the shape was more rectangular instead of perfectly cylindrical, the tire columns could be stacked. This opened up a whole new box of ideas and opportunities.

"It's a lot like the logs in a log home - flat on the top and bottom and round on the side," Hansen explained. "You have a whole lot of different applications now. You can basically build a wall of any kind, like a retaining wall, a sea wall or a wall for a house."

For the idea, Hansen received a grant from Empire State Development to continue the research and development aspect of the Tire Log. Using modified equipment in North Tonawanda, Re-Tread Products built a retaining wall out of Tire Logs as a demonstration.

After another grant, Re-Tread products was able to develop a prototype machine, which Hansen calls a winder, that is located at the Rochester Street Industrial Park in Salamanca. The machine wraps and tightens the treads of used tires together more efficiently and made it possible for Re-Tread Products to create a "log home" out of Tire Logs, a sea wall at Onoville Marina and a few check dams in Ashford to help control flooding in ditches.

"These demonstrations went well," Hansen said. "The first question of whether or not this stuff worked was answered. The second question now is whether or not we can make this thing cost effective."

Hansen said Re-Tread Products is now trying to piece together a business plan with a board of advisers and a professional looking presentation taken from video footage of the demonstrations. Cattaraugus County has shown interest in the idea and it has been backed by many government representatives including Sens. Cathy Young, Chuck Schumer and Kristen Gillibrand.

"Once we have our presentation ready, we are going to throw it back at everybody and tell them that we can create jobs and we can create a new green building product," Hansen said about hopes of getting another grant.

He added that if they get another grant through Empire State Development, it could be in the form of a \$500,000 matching grant, which means Re-Tread Products would need to come up with \$500,000 themselves to get it. Hansen said this is possible through grants from other agencies.

Hansen also said that if Tire Logs can be cost effective, Re-Tread Products would like to open its first pilot factory on Rochester St. The company is now owned by his son, Shane, although Hansen does continue to play a vital role in making his idea a reality.



Photo submitted Workers transport a Tire Log via forklift. Re-Tread Products of Great Valley has been making Tire Logs, which are made of recycled tires, to use for a variety of demonstrations over the past five years.

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