

GCC Q&A

Chip DeJean
General Manager
Louisiana Scrap Metal
Recycling (Port Allen, La.)



*(Third in a monthly series of profile interviews
with Gulf Coast Chapter members.)*

Born: May 18, 1965, in Baton Rouge, La.

Education: I earned a Bachelor of Science degree in accounting from Louisiana State University in 1987.

Family: I've been with my beautiful wife, Kelly, since we were 18. We've now been married 32 years (wonderful and joyous years if you ask her). We have two grown daughters—Simone (27) and Camille (25).

When and how did you enter the recycling industry? I don't have the typical story of growing up in the business and going to work on weekends with my father or grandfather. When I graduated from LSU, Kelly and I moved to the Cayman Islands and then Hawaii, where I worked as a controller and then general manager for a water-sports/scuba diving operation. I worked in paradise for nine years and thought I'd never leave that lifestyle.

After having children, we decided to move closer to Louisiana to allow our children to grow up around their grandparents and relatives. We returned to Louisiana, with no intention of making it our final destination. Through one of my wife's friends, I interviewed with John Rongey, who had just opened a small scrapyard in Port Allen, La. Up to this point, the only experience and knowledge I had with a scrapyard was

watching *Sanford & Son* on TV. At this point, I really needed a job, so I joined the company as administrative manager. Soon after being hired, I moved into the general manager position, where I've been for the past 24 years.

What was it about the industry that prompted you to build a career in it? It's a very diverse and dynamic industry and business. There aren't many businesses in which you can work with a Fortune 500 company in the morning and then some challenging retail customers in the afternoon and get equal satisfaction dealing with both levels of personalities. Every day is different for me, and there's always something to learn. I'm able to be involved in multiple business areas every day, including accounting, administration, operations, maintenance, and sales. And the pay has been pretty good, too.

What have been your most rewarding professional achievements? Personal achievements? My biggest professional achievement is being lucky enough to connect with John Rongey at the beginning of his business. He has allowed me to help him grow the business in Port Allen from a 12-acre dirt/mud site with 12 employees in the middle of a sugar cane field to a 26-acre, modern, hard-surfaced waterfront facility where we employ multiple generations of employees and have little employee turnover. More than half of my Port Allen staff has been with me for 15-plus years, and several have retired after years with the company. I think I bring stability to the business and staff. I also formed the Louisiana Recyclers Association in 2011 and have been its president since then. Personally, I'm thrilled my wife has tolerated me for the past 37 years and that our children and their crew still like hanging out and traveling with us.

What are you passionate about? I like doing anything outdoors—hunting, fishing, golfing, hiking, boating, swimming, exercising, and even working in the yard. Kelly and I also enjoy traveling and rarely go to the same place twice.

Tell us something about you that would surprise people. I was a Dive Master in my younger days and probably logged over 1,500 dives before I quit diving in the mid-1990s. I also did some crazy spearfishing at the oil rigs in Louisiana in my college days. Looking back, I can't believe I didn't get seriously hurt during those trips.

If you could improve anything about yourself, what would it be? I always wished I was a better listener and was more empathetic.

What do you like to do in your free time? Spend time with my wife, children, and all of the combined friends. And does eating count?

When and why did your company decide to join ISRI and

the Gulf Coast Chapter? We probably joined ISRI and the GCC in 1997. We were a relatively small and new company. We wanted to learn more about the scrap business. We also wanted to forge new business relationships and broaden our opportunities with more diverse ferrous and nonferrous buyers.

Have you held any volunteer leadership positions within GCC? I've been on the GCC Board of Directors for the past three or so years. A good friend of mine, Alton Schaubhut [of Commercial Metals Co.], has pulled me in to join the Executive Committee and start serving as an officer in the near future.

What benefits have you received from your GCC involvement? Other than the countless friends I've made, our company's GCC involvement has allowed it to expand our markets, grow our business, maintain a safe operation, provide excellent training for staff and management, and stay well-informed over the past 10 to 12 years.

What are the major challenges facing your company and the overall recycling industry today? The relentless legislation and attempted legislative maneuvers to regulate our industry. Educating our legislative officials, potential victims of metals theft, and law enforcement is a never-ending process, so thank goodness for our lobbyist. Also, the cost of insurance, particularly auto insurance, and the very litigious nature of our state is extremely frustrating. I sometimes feel like our trucks have a personal injury attorney sign on them instructing how to get a free paycheck.

The **Gulf Coast Chapter** is committed to being a conduit for more communication with its members. Going forward you will receive communications via email in the areas of:

- Regional and National Industry News/Information
- Member Q&A Interviews
- Safety
- New Member Introductions
- Community Involvement/Advocacy ... and more!

For more information on the Gulf Coast Chapter, visit gulfisri.com or contact a chapter officer:

President: Haley Glick Rountree, Tri-State Iron & Metal Co.

First Vice President: Nidhi Turakhia, Allied Alloys

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