

GCC Q&A

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Born: I was born Dec. 26, 1980, in San Antonio, Texas.

Education: I graduated from Rice University in 2003 with a BA in the development of modern Latin America and from the London School of Economics in 2006 with an MS in social policy.

Family: I married Albert Shannon in 2016. We've known each other practically our whole lives but didn't date until our 30s. We have a 2-year-old daughter named Sylvia Bell Shannon who attends the same preschool Albert and I attended.

When and how did you enter the recycling industry? I joined Monterrey Iron & Metal in 2008. Before that, I worked in federal policy reform for Appleaseed, a nonprofit network that promotes justice and expands opportunities that help low-income people and working families build better lives. I had the best of both worlds in that I lived in Austin, Texas, even though the organization's main office was in Washington, D.C. At one point, I had to make a decision whether to continue in policy work or join the family recycling business. I realized I'd be less likely to change jobs after I was 30 and that my grandfather [Harold Vexler] was getting older. So I decided to join the family business, and I was fortunate to work several years with my grandfather until he passed in 2015 at 100 years old. I still miss the policy work but find a lot of joy serving on boards.

What was it about the industry that prompted you to build a career in it? I've been an environmental advocate and a

believer in the three R's my whole life. I also subscribe to the Hebrew expression *tikkun olam*—which means “repairing the world”—so the transition from doing policy work to recycling had the same ethic to it. When I joined Monterrey Iron & Metal, I truly started from zero. I didn't know the difference between HMS and P&S. I had to learn the most basic things because I absorbed no knowledge of the industry as I grew up. I really didn't spend time in the scrapyards like my brothers. So that was a challenge—but fortunately I love challenges. I also absolutely love innovation and equipment. My father [Jack Vexler] gave me the leeway to design, purchase, and install new systems for the business, and he still hasn't said no to any of my ideas. So every year there is a new project, a new challenge, a new way to improve and grow the company. I think everyone in the scrap metal recycling business enjoys that there are never two days alike and never a boring moment.

What have been your most rewarding professional achievements? I enjoy every time we have a successful startup of new equipment in the yard. I also celebrate the smaller improvements like adding new financial management tools.

What are you passionate about? I am passionate about the environment and recycling, so it's special to be able to participate in recycling every day—at home and at work. As a fourth generation San Antonian, I'm also passionate about our community—at Monterrey Iron & Metal and in the broader city. We believe in supporting our community and do so by volunteering on local boards.

Tell us something about you that would surprise people. I lived in Ecuador for several years working in community development. I am fluent in Spanish.

If you could improve anything about yourself, what would it be? My impatience. Anyone who knows me will tell you I am impatient.

What do you like to do in your free time? The pandemic sure has changed this. I used to be with friends *all* the time. Now I relish playing with my daughter and being in the country as much as possible.

When and why did your company decide to join ISRI and the Gulf Coast Chapter? My father, grandfather, and great-grandfather have a longstanding tradition of being part of our industry's trade association. My father believes that we joined [the Institute of Scrap Iron and Steel, an ISRI predecessor] prior to his birth, circa 1938. At the time, they were motivated to represent and articulate the role of our industry with one voice and a common approach. The networking events were especially important to my father as he grew our business and installed our first shredder. To this day, we believe strongly in giving back to our scrap recycling community by participating at the state, regional, and national levels of our trade associations. We've made and maintained many friendships

through our association with ISRI.

What leadership positions have you held within GCC?

Years ago, as I was assimilating into the scrap recycling world, Haley Glick [of Tri-State Iron & Metal Co. in Texarkana, Ark.], Walter Blackburn [of Davis Iron & Metal in Fort Smith, Ark.], a few others, and I worked together on Scrap.edu, an educational program that provided great networking opportunities for newer people to our industry. I met some of my closest contacts through helping to organize and participating in those events.

What benefits have you received from your GCC

involvement? Being involved in GCC ensures that I stay up to date on issues and opportunities for our industry and our organization. Through participation, I'm also able to stay in touch with people across the region.

What leadership positions, if any, have you held on the ISRI national level? I'm a member of some ISRI committees. I'm also the current chair of NASCO-OP—the purchasing cooperative for the recycling industry—and have served on its board for about 10 years.

What are the major challenges facing your company and the overall recycling industry today? There's a constant push to modernize and beautify, which can help with efficiency, community perception, and employee recruitment and retention. I also believe we need to address the excessive and often misrepresentative litigation from plaintiffs' attorneys for automotive and general liability insurance claims.