

GCC Q&A

**Mel Wright, President
Wright's Scrap Metals Inc.
(Beaumont, Texas)**



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

Born: I was born in Beaumont, Texas, on Sept. 17, 1958.

Education: I attended Lamar University in Beaumont, graduating in 1981 with a Bachelor of Business Administration degree in management.

Family: I married Neysa Rush in 1980. We have two children—Ashley (37) in Fort Worth and Jonathan (32) in Beaumont—and three grandchildren, including twin grandsons (7) and one granddaughter (10 months).

When and how did you enter the recycling industry? I grew up in it. My dad started Wright's Scrap Metals Inc. in 1968. I worked summers at the company during high school, and I started working full time there even while I was in college. After

graduating, I officially started my career in the scrap industry by going straight to work with my dad. A couple of years into my career, I had a chance to work for another recycling company, but I decided not to do that. I took over general management of the company from my dad around 2005.

What was it about the industry that made you want to work in it? I'd seen my dad build a nice career in the industry, and that attracted me. I also liked the buying and selling aspect of the business. The dealmaking is always fun. And no two days are ever the same. You never know what's going to roll across the scale, what somebody will try to recycle, or what characters will come into the yard.

What have been your most rewarding professional achievements? It was a pleasure and an honor to serve as president of the Gulf Coast Chapter from 2015 to 2017. I especially enjoyed meeting other chapter presidents and ISRI national leaders during my term. I've built lasting friendships with many of those people. Probably my greatest professional highlight, though, is being named as the recipient of the Gulf Coast Chapter's 2020 Israel Proler Award, which honors a recycler's lifetime achievements in the industry. I'm honored to be included in the list of great people who previously received the award.

What are you passionate about? Volunteering. I'm a volunteer at heart. I'm just proud to serve and give back to my community. Currently, I serve on the board of directors of the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo. I also serve on a nonprofit that gives scholarships to local students in our county. That's a big thrill. And I work with the Beaumont Convention and Visitors Bureau and also volunteer at my church.

If you could improve anything about yourself, what would it be? Definitely my listening skills. My wife tells me that all the time. To really listen, you have to stop what you're doing and pay attention not only to what you hear but what you see when speaking with someone.

What do you like to do in your free time ? I like to read, hunt,

and golf. I like to eat, too, which won't surprise anyone. They could tell that by looking at me. My wife and I also like to travel.

When and why did your company decide to join ISRI and the Gulf Coast Chapter? Our company was a longtime member of the Institute of Scrap Iron and Steel and the National Association of Recycling Industries—ISRI's predecessor associations. It's hard to put a dollar value on the benefits you get from ISRI and GCC, including networking, safety resources, and so much more. My participation in ISRI and the chapter has taught me to speak up and advocate for my business and our industry, to be proud of the environmental and economic good our companies do. I was never one to go to the state capital or Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C., but thanks to ISRI and GCC, I'm now active on the advocacy front.

How did you get involved in GCC leadership positions? My first involvement was heading up the chapter's history committee back in the early-to-mid-1980s. I started getting really involved in the chapter around 2005, and I climbed the chapter leadership ladder until I became GCC president in 2015.

Have you been active in other industry trade groups? I served as secretary/treasurer of the Recycling Council of Texas in the mid-1980s. Later, I served as a vice president, and I'm now president of the group. I also serve as a member on the State of Texas Alliance for Recycling, which focuses primarily on curbside recycling. I'm involved with that group to keep up with the issues in that sector and make sure the scrap industry has a seat at the table.

What are the major challenges facing your company and the overall recycling industry today? One problem is that we're always competing against small pop-up recycling operators that don't abide by the regulations. They compete against us for retail trade. If we follow the laws and they don't—because they're mobile, with no fixed operations—they have a competitive advantage.

Regulations in general are always a big concern, and the pandemic has imposed even more rules on our operations. In

addition to cutting our operating hours, we started using bottled water instead of coolers, closed our water fountains, and quit making coffee for customers. We only let one retail customer in our pay room at a time to ensure social distancing. Our lunch rooms can have no more than three people in them at a time, and we now hold our safety meetings in the warehouse so people can maintain a safe distance. And, of course, we implemented a thorough sanitizing regimen in our offices, trucks, equipment, and yard. Keeping up with all of that is challenging, but we've made it work, and we haven't had to lay off anyone.

Overall, the last two or three years have been difficult in terms of market conditions, and they've shown how much the world is intertwined. Trade changes, shifts in manufacturing, and other economic trends change the material flow into our scrap operations, and we have to adapt. It's a constantly changing scenario, and you need good, smart people working for you to succeed. You need a crew that can handle anything and make it safely through the day.

As a final point, it's very important for people to participate in the trade association. If you put no effort in, all you'll get is a book with some phone numbers in it. If you participate, you get to meet the fine people in your association. Hopefully you get to do business with some of them and build lifelong friends.

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

Second Vice President: Becky Proler, SCR Recycling

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