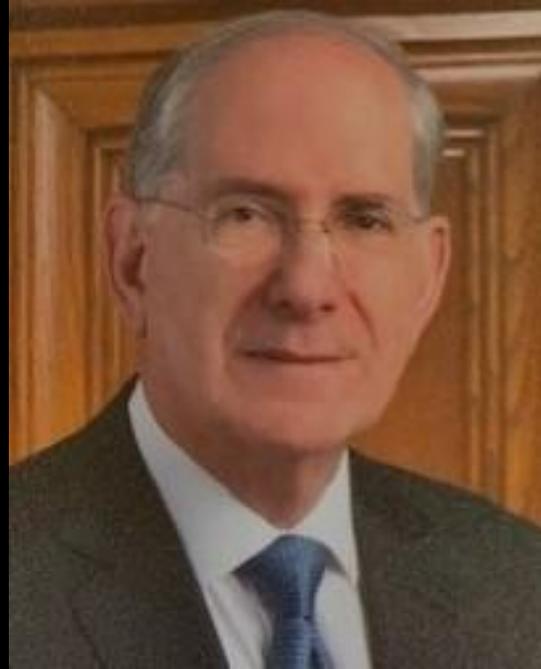


# GCC Q&A

**Arnold Gachman**  
Gamtex Industries  
(Fort Worth, Texas)



**How many years have you been involved in the recycling business?** I earned my first paycheck when I was 16 and I'm 79 now, so that makes 63 years. Truthfully, I started out when I was a baby. I was 18 months old when my parents took me to my first industry convention in Chicago. As a kid, I also attended and ran around the Gulf Coast Chapter conventions. In 1961, after a year of college, I returned to Fort Worth and joined my family's scrap business full time, while in college, and I've been in it ever since. I now serve as chairman of the board of Gamtex Industries, and I work pretty much full time.

**Describe your typical workday activities.** I deal mostly with the administrative side of the business—insurance, compliance issues, government relations, banking, long-range planning, and real estate. I start my morning by checking emails, reviewing the early morning markets, and talking with our managers or my son, Iric, the company's CEO. I talk frequently with industry contacts across the country, and I'm also part of one daily and two weekly groups of local business leaders. I definitely stay busy. And I'm very involved in the community. My pet project now is helping to raise money for a medical school at Texas Christian University in Fort Worth.

**What do you like and dislike about the business today?** I've always loved that this is a relationship business in which your word is your bond. Despite all of today's technology, it still comes down to the ability to make a deal with people and be able to trust each other's word. What I don't like is the loss of family-owned businesses. The industry has evolved to be more corporate and run by professionals, with so much of the

business owned by large institutions. While it's still possible to have positive business relationships, it's much harder to establish the long-standing personal connections like we could do in the past.

**What are the most significant changes you've seen in the recycling business over your career?** There have been a lot of equipment innovations, most notably the automobile shredder in the late-1950s, which transformed the scrap industry. Then came the guillotine shear, automated balers, wire chopping, specialty analysis separation equipment, and hydraulic cranes with various attachments for processing loading/unloading scrap into equipment, housekeeping, and shipping. I've also seen the evolution of "megayards" with small feeder yards—the hub-and-spoke approach. And in more recent decades, steel mills have bought and control a significant portion of the scrap industry. They dramatically influence the market now.

**What do you recall from your time as a GCC officer in the late 1970s/early 1980s under the Institute of Scrap Iron and Steel [an ISRI predecessor]?** During my time as first vice president, I recall the chapter was having financial trouble. We were planning a chapter convention at the Anatole in Dallas, and when I visited the venue, I thought, "We should sell tables to vendors to defray the cost of the hospitality suite and let them display info about their products." I think we charged them \$175 per table. That was the first time the chapter decided to purposely make a profit on its convention.

As the chapter's president, I recall we had to battle scrap theft legislation in Texas. The national associations—ISIS and NARI [the National Association of Recycling Industries, another ISRI predecessor]—were both trying to directly interact with legislators in Austin. I told them we could handle it better through the chapter, and we did. That experience led us to establish an advocacy structure within each state in the GCC chapter. We could then cover the legislative and regulatory issues that arose in each of our states. During this time, we also dealt with Superfund cases related to some battery plants in Texas.

**What were the challenges and rewards of serving as GCC president?** One of the best benefits was building relationships with new people within the chapter. I also got to meet many legends of the industry who were in the Gulf Coast Chapter. The only drawback was I had to take time away from my business, but I had great support people in my company and region who stepped up to help me.

**You later were elected to be ISRI's national president from 1992–1994. What do you recall about that experience?** It was like getting a doctorate in scrap. I got an education that was far beyond anything I could have imagined, in part thanks

to mentors and past association leaders like Morton “Sonny” Plant, who convinced me to run for national ISRI office. I was mentored and supported by so many industry leaders and staff. They were wonderful to me and would come to my aid and counsel whenever there was an issue. Everywhere I went as ISRI president, members were open, gracious, and extremely responsive to whatever we asked them to do for the industry and the association.

I remember we faced some environmental issues regarding shredder fluff as well as Superfund, and there were always chapter issues. On the international front, there were some export issues related to the Basel Convention and the Rio Treaty. It was my honor to represent ISRI at meetings of the BIR [Bureau of International Recycling] in England and France during my term. Those were highlights of my life and career. I also recall we had to make some difficult economic decisions shortly after the merger of ISIS and NARI to create ISRI. We realized the association couldn’t survive from just its membership dues, so it needed a different financial view of its convention, services, and *Scrap* magazine. Our decisions at that time changed the face of ISRI going forward.

**Thanks to your chapter and association service, you received ISRI’s Lifetime Achievement Award in 2013. How did it feel to receive that award?** It certainly was a great honor—and perhaps a little premature. There are many people who haven’t received the award who deserved it long before I did. But I definitely consider it one of the highlights of my career. It was incredibly humbling to be included in that elite group. I also was proud to receive the Israel Proler Award from GCC back in 1991. I knew Israel Proler—he was one of the legends of the industry—and it was an honor to receive the award named after him.

**What advice would you give to the new generation entering the recycling business and GCC?** It’s incredibly important to understand that giving back—through your business career or your industry association—makes you a better person as well as helping the industry. That’s like putting down the cornerstone to be able to build a building. Life isn’t just about what you do for work every day; there’s a whole other side to the world that you need to be aware of and share for the benefit of future generations.