

GCC Q&A

Zach Shemper
Director of Marketing
Jackson Iron &
Metal Co. Inc.
(Jackson, Miss.)



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

Born: I was born July 14—Bastille Day—1980 in Hattiesburg, Miss.

Education: I attended the University of Alabama my freshman year and realized I wasn't quite ready for academia and needed to take a year off. I took a sabbatical in Laramie, Wyo., for a year and got some life experience out West—waiting tables at three different restaurants and a ski resort. In reality, I went skiing and fly fishing. Upon returning home to Hattiesburg, I earned a BA in Broadcast Journalism from the University of Southern Mississippi. My true education came early by growing up in a family business in South Mississippi established in 1905. I'm a fourth-generation scrapper.

Family: I have four children and a very patient and strong wife who has always been able to put up with being married to a “junkman” and all that entails. Jen and I have been together for 12 years and married for seven. When not at a scrapyard or in a field looking at a pile of scrap, I focus my energy on our children—Ella Rosenthal (6), Evie Raine (4), Asher (2), and Sam Emry (5 months)—as well as our dog, Roger de Beagle (13 and holding).

How many family members are still in the business?

Growing up, all of my brothers worked at the yard at some point, and out of five boys I was the only one to stick with it. I have many cousins who also worked at the yard, and David Shemper of HCS Trading and Joshua Shemper of TRG, A Division of Alter, are still rocking it in the industry as well.

When and how did you enter the recycling industry? I, like many others, did not enter or start in the business, but rather it was more like osmosis. My great-grandfather, Sam Shemper, emigrated from Russia, passing through Castle Garden in Manhattan. He started bartering and trading scrap upon arriving in Hattiesburg in 1905.

When I was 7 or so, I'd go through garbage cans at the local racquet club for the aluminum cans and would give the bags to my dad to take to the yard and sell for me. I always felt he treated me right on the pricing. My love of recycling continued as I worked at the yard through high school and my college summers. I came back full time in 2007.

In May 2007, a few months before Ben Shemper & Sons, Inc. was sold to Alter Trading, I returned to Hattiesburg from working at CNN in Atlanta to man the scale at the dealer gate. After the acquisition, I told my cousin, David, who was yard manager at the time, that I'd give him two years and then I was out. In those two years, while I was figuring out what to do with the rest of my life, I realized I was already doing it.

After this epiphany, I put more effort into growing myself within the industry. I became the nonferrous supervisor at Alter and at one point was yard manager of a facility in Gulfport, Miss. After working for Alter from May 2007 to November 2015, Clay Crystal of Jackson Iron & Metal hired me as a buyer for the company's Louisiana yards. Within 18 months I was promoted to marketing director and am now based out of Jackson, Miss.

I have spent the last five years or so building relationships within the industry and gaining true friends and mentors because I believe "there are those who work in the scrap industry and those of us who *are* the scrap industry." I've been fortunate to work for a company that sees the benefit of ISRI and its meetings that offer ample opportunity to network and build connections that can become mutually beneficial relationships forever.

What do you enjoy about your current position? At Jackson Iron & Metal, I find it rewarding to work for a company with such diverse operations. We have a wire chopper, a shredder, and a full-service scrapyards, so I get to see all sides of many tables. I'm always buying, and I'm always selling. I also enjoy working with our great team led by Misti Walters, our vice president of operations.

What are you passionate about? I try to be passionate about

anything I do. If one does not enjoy or is not passionate about what they are doing, they should do something else.

If you could improve anything about yourself, what would it be? I'd like to be more focused. In my job, I'm pulled in different directions all the time. Every day is a new challenge, and my priority list changes with the direction of the wind. In this business we call it "controlled chaos"!

What do you like to do in your free time? In my free time I try to make sure the little humans in my house do not perish—they have to be fed, loved, and watered daily to make sure they grow up strong and healthy. Yes, I'm referring to my children.

When and why did your company decide to join ISRI and the Gulf Coast Chapter? Jackson Iron has been an ISRI member for more than 30 years. The company has always seen the importance and benefits of being part of this association that helps our industry so much and has invaluable people investing and volunteering their time to better the system for us all. I also believe that Jackson Iron as well as Ben Shemper & Sons were members of the Institute of Scrap Iron and Steel [an ISRI predecessor association]. Manny Crystal—Clay Crystal's dad—was also president of GCC in 1970-1972.

Have you held any volunteer leadership positions within GCC? I've been on the GCC Board of Directors in the past, and I feel that being involved is critical to fulfill our own goals and the chapter's goals as a whole. Being a GCC member has been great. Our chapter has many people who invest a lot of time to make sure we all know what's going on locally and nationally. It has been awesome to work closely with the members who dedicate themselves to the greater good. Our chapter has always been very involved, and it is only because of the wonderful professionals in the Gulf Coast region.

What are the major challenges facing your company and the overall recycling industry today? One major challenge has been the instability of the flows of scrap as well as the uncertainty of the markets. Also, in recent years, China's Green Fence and Green Sword initiatives on scrap imports as well as tariffs on goods has hindered us at times due to not having many options for the finished goods. Especially on the wire-chopping side, the export market seems to dry up and domestic consumers get saturated quickly with material, and then the yards and/or choppers get saturated. As one of my mentors once said, "A buyer gets paid to buy scrap—and at times to *not* buy scrap." Fortunately, our company has relationships with our key consumers, and most of the time everyone is willing to work together to get through whatever issues need to be overcome.

Do you have any final note to the chapter? I will forever be grateful for the Gulf Coast region and those who hold its leadership positions. One is only as strong as those you surround yourself with, and I have to say that if the Gulf Coast region was a mythological character, it would be Hercules. I don't know what my future holds, but I do know that I will always be a scrapper no matter what I do or where I go. I love this business and most of the people I deal with. I have found the most interesting people in my life through scrapping and there is never a dull moment, which keeps it exciting.

#livingmybestlife