

Mon 9 March, 2009



Bagela Usa's David Brennan, left, and Greg Harla at the company's Shelton property.

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Road warriors give new life to old roads

BY ALEXANDER SOULE

On a chilly day near the Shelton riverfront, the operators of a front-end loader dumped a load of pavement debris into an orange hopper. In the space of minutes, out streamed a steamy batch of fresh asphalt ready for spreading. It might just provide the foundation for the next great construction equipment company in Fairfield County.

If Westport-based Terex Corp. holds that crown today with billions of dollars in revenue, do not blame the comparatively tiny Shelton-based Bagela USA for thinking big. Started by David Brennan, Greg Harla and Alan Thompson, the company is selling asphalt recyclers from Germany-based Bagela Baumaschinen GmbH that can pump out fresh asphalt from pavement rubble. The Bagela machine allows a worker to dispose of as much as 10 tons of asphalt waste an hour, using a reheating and mixing process. While highways require more asphalt than can be practically produced by the machines, the devices can help cut costs fourfold for smaller road-repair or utility projects that use limited amounts of paving.

Utilities are where Brennan Construction largely made its mark, with the century-old company having worked on several large local projects including Northeast Utilities' 345-kilovolt transmission cables into Fairfield County that rescued the region's rickety electric grid.

Brennan Construction and Bagela occupy a modest brick edifice just off Bridgeport Avenue in Shelton. Brennan Construction runs a gravel pit south of the city's downtown river district.

The road from a services-based model to that of a product vendor is strewn with potholes, but the novelty of Bagela's product should capture attention, according to David Brennan, co-owner of Bagela USA and Brennan. Fewer than 100 Bagela machines are used in the United States today, compared to more than 2,000 in Europe and other regions.

The city of Milford has been using a Bagela machine for three years, and has already reaped a full return on its investment, according to Bruce Kolwicz, the city's director of public works.

Where it costs contractors roughly \$85 a ton for fresh asphalt, a Bagela machine can produce it for just \$20 a ton, noted Harla, who heads sales and marketing for Bagela. And the machine also offers an obvious environmental benefit in sparing landfills from large amounts of asphalt debris.

The most common process for recycling asphalt is reducing an existing roadway to rubble and topping the debris with fresh asphalt, according to the Asphalt Pavement Alliance trade group.

If ever a company were at the right place at the right time, it might be Bagela, with federal and state governments hoping to rise from the rubble of the economy through a mix of new infrastructure construction and "green" jobs focused on the environment. With Connecticut and other states whipping up attention on "shovel ready" sites for immediate funding from the government, Harla hopes to elevate Bagela's profile as a long-term payoff.

Bagela recently showcased the machine's benefits at the World of Asphalt trade show this week in Orlando, Fla., competing for attention with scores of other companies, including Terex at the other end of the convention hall.

Even as it sets about selling the Bagela machine, the company is seeking patent protection for a second construction product it hopes to sell – a device to extract heavy loads such as shoring from confined spaces.