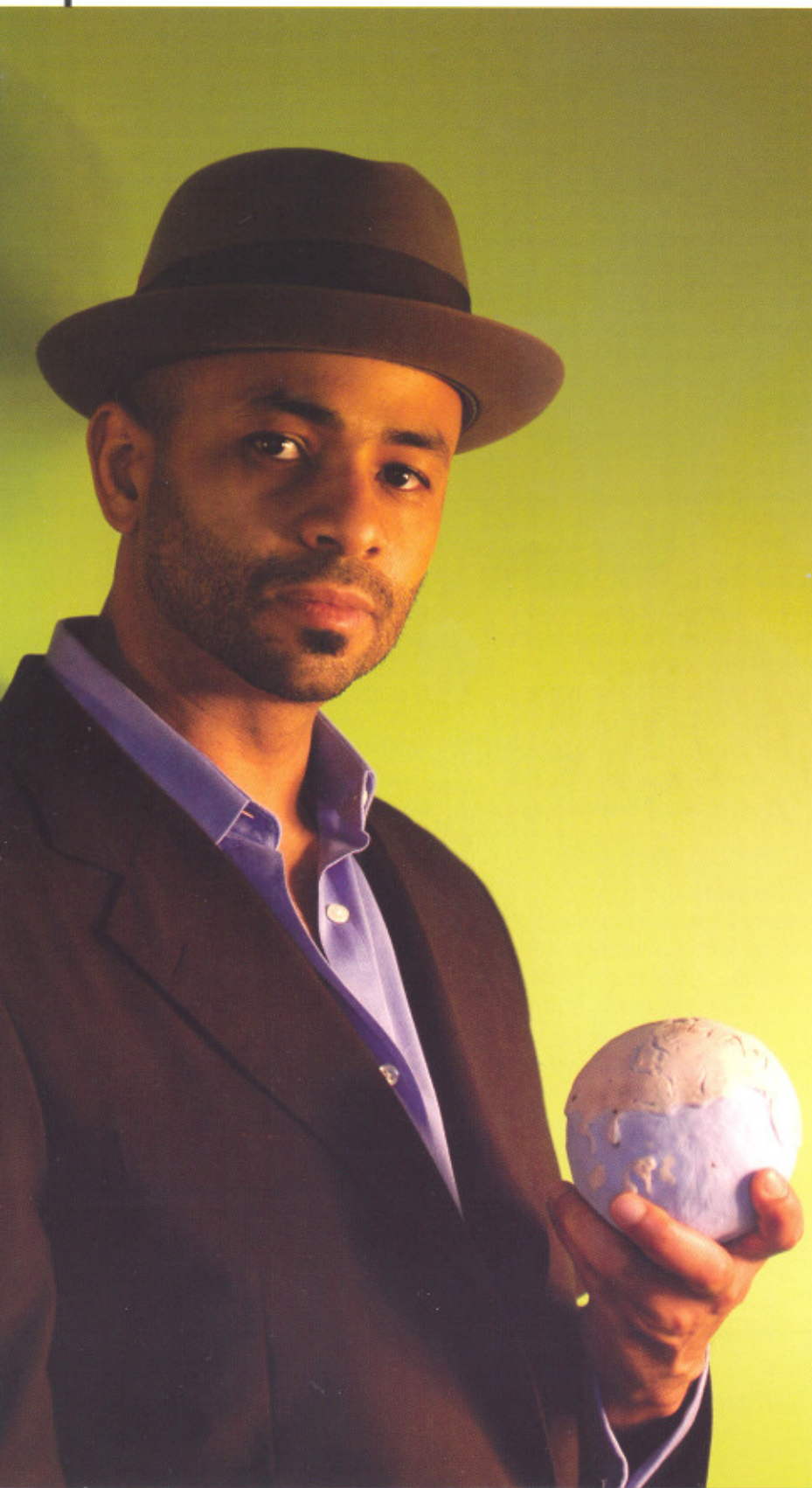


ULSDC *Success Story*



Recon Recycling is a remarkable business, built through the very service it provides. The company's mission statement is "Recycle everything," exemplified through the company's history and the decisions of its management team.

Richard McCaskill, one of the company's founders and its CEO, believes that everyone -and everything - deserves a second chance. He and his business partner, Markus Olson, began the company after a failed foray into the music industry.

Recon Recycling

Aims to Give 'Paper, Bottles & People' a Second Chance

By Alex Padilla, Union Tribune Staff Writer

"We didn't have any startup capital, so we had to collect recyclables and transform the revenue from the recyclables into support for the business - rent, whatever the general costs were - and, as far as the tools for the business, we utilized our old van from the music business and whatever containers we needed were salvaged from the trash," said McCaskill. "Most of the things we used to start this business were recycled things."

The growing Recon Recycling team included a number of homeless recruits, from whom McCaskill and Olson learned a great deal about the best places to find recyclable products. They also learned from other businesses in the industry, asking questions and gathering necessary information. In time, the growing business attracted the attention of various entrepreneurs and investors, leading to Recon Recycling's current management team, another expression of the company's commitment to diversity.

McCaskill laughingly compared the management team to the United Nations, but the analogy is not a complete exaggeration. The team includes people of varied ethnic and cultural backgrounds - covering the countries of Korea, Persia, Brazil, Mexico, Spain and Afghanistan, to name a few - as well as different professional backgrounds, from military experience to law and finance.

Whether it is a question of taking on a new employee or taking in the lowliest broken bottle lying in a dumpster, the people at Recon Recycling learn from everyone and recycle everything.

"We recycle people also - paper, bottles

and people," said McCaskill, commenting on the number of people who need jobs, but may not have the training necessary to obtain them or may have been in an unfortunate situation. "If you give a person an opportunity, you'd be surprised at what they can learn, and how powerful they can be."

The Recon Recycling workforce, the employees who complete the daily routes and perform the activities that keep the company functioning, are what James Holland, a member of the management team and financial advisor, calls the "heart and soul of the business, because without them, we wouldn't have anything. You're only as good as your employees let you be."

Recon Recycling's goal for every employee is to provide training in every aspect of the business, allowing employees to receive the advanced training they may not have found otherwise.

Melvin Anderson is at least one Recon Recycling employee who appreciates the welcoming atmosphere and commitment to second chances. After completing an 8-year prison sentence, he looked to the Urban League of San Diego County for guidance and assistance in developing a new life for himself. The Urban League enrolled him in a pilot program, after which he was introduced to Richard McCaskill and found his "happily ever after" at Recon Recycling.

"What makes the job the best for me is the people - the people that I meet, the people that I work with," said Anderson. "There's no judgment, say, because of my background. (For example,) I have tattoos. People see my tat-

toos and I'm not looked upon differently, because of my tattoos, because of my background, because of my ethnic upbringing."

Anderson is living proof of the value of the program put in place by Maurice Wilson, vice president of business and workforce development for the Urban League of San Diego County. As Recon Recycling grows and moves to a larger location to take on more production and more employees, his role in the company will grow to include being a mentor and trainer for the new employees.

"You know, some people are given chances based on their background, or their upbringing or whatever it may be," said Holland, "but, then again, some people aren't given those chances and it's not their own fault, it's because of their environment."

The Urban League of San Diego County and companies like Recon Recycling are giving people that opportunity, a second chance to make a difference.

As Anderson expressed simply, the company is "doing something for the world." They are healing the environment through the elimination of waste and healing society through a diverse workforce, recycling "paper, bottles and people."

