



December 29, 2023

VIA Electronic Submission

To Whom It May Concern:

Aspen Waste Systems of Minnesota, Inc. hereby submits this Response to the City of St. Paul's Request for Proposals for Mixed Municipal Solid Waste/Yard Waste (MSW/Yard Waste), Bulky Items/Problem Materials, and Recyclables Collection Services. Aspen has specifically submitted a bid response for 5-year contract comprised of MSW/Yard Waste services for 20,000 of the City's residential 1-4 unit properties.

Enclosed are the Following:

- Form A: Content Checklist
- Form B: Proposer Information Questionnaire
- Form C: Proposer Qualifications Questionnaire
- Form D: Certification of Binding Signature
- Form E: Certification of Independent Proposal Pricing
- Form F: Price Worksheet
- Form G: Itemized Listing of Trucks and Other Collection Equipment
- Form H: Certification of Acceptance of the Draft Agreement or Notification of Proposed Exceptions
- Form I: Acknowledgement of Receipt of Addenda
- Waste Today article

We are dedicated to providing extraordinary service, and we look forward to continuing our work for the City of St. Paul residents. Please visit our website, aspenwaste.com for more information about our Company. We have also enclosed an article from Waste Today about our Company for your review. Thank you again for the opportunity and your most serious consideration of Aspen Waste Systems.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Alexa Fang".

Alexa Fang
Aspen Waste Systems of Minnesota

Enclosures

Independent spirit

BY ADAM REDLING

Bob Kircher has cast Aspen Waste in his image with a focus on autonomy and service.



From left: Aspen's Thor Nelson, Bob Kircher, and Alexa Kircher Fang



Many independent waste companies are run by those who have cut their teeth in the industry. Often, after moving from driver to supervisory roles, the entrepreneurial spirit will compel an individual to set out on their own. Other times, second- or third-generation family who have grown up in the business will take over the operation or decide to branch out in other markets with a new company.

Bob Kircher has a different story.

Kircher grew up in Minneapolis working at his father's meat market. After graduating with a bachelor's degree in economics from the University of Minnesota, Kircher went on to get his law degree from the University of Minnesota Law School in 1970.

From there, Kircher established a burgeoning private practice and also served as general counsel at Bluebird Inc. of Chicago, one of the nation's largest meat producers at the time.

In addition to his law practice, Kircher found success as a real estate investor

and worked as a campaign manager and aide to some of Minnesota's most prominent political figures.

Despite his success, Kircher decided at the age of 50 that he wanted a new challenge. After surveying the business landscape of Minneapolis, Kircher set his sights on the waste sector where he thought his mind for strategy and his competitive spirit would position an up-start for success. In 1990, he left his legal career behind to found Aspen Waste.

THE BEGINNINGS OF SOMETHING BIG

Kircher began Aspen Waste with one truck and one driver.

After observing the local competition, Kircher was convinced that there was an opportunity to compete and set out to build a business that embodied the service, quality and professionalism he thought would gain traction in the market.

According to Kircher, there were two notable things working in the Minneapolis-based company's favor in those early days: The Twin Cities of Minneapolis-Saint Paul had publicly owned disposal facilities that provided

Aspen an opportunity to compete with an exclusive focus on hauling, and the company's steadfast focus on sales allowed it to steadily build its commercial customer base even in a competitive waste landscape.

"At the company's beginning, Aspen was far more driven by sales than the competition and experienced high growth rates," Kircher explains. "From the beginning, Aspen has had a substantial sales team focused on selling commercial waste and recycling services. The sales team not only generates new business, but also acts as an ongoing point of contact for customers. They're knowledgeable, responsive and professional. Aspen also answers all phones locally with real, live people who are trained to solve problems."

While this aggressive sales strategy has paid dividends over time, it did lead to some growing pains during the company's early years.

"As a small company, the more success you had, the more financial problems it created with the company's capital requirements," Kircher explains.

To overcome these hurdles, Kircher

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Each of our markets has been entered by starting from scratch. There's a cost to doing it that way, but it allows us to build the company and culture the Aspen way.”

—BOB KIRCHER, FOUNDER AND CEO, ASPEN WASTE



and his then-business partner leveraged their experience in finance to develop unconventional strategies for raising money without ceding control or stock of the company. One such strategy was issuing subordinated debentures to individual family members and friends.

By being nimble financially, Kircher was able to access the capital the company needed without having to sacrifice his vision for Aspen's operations.

Additionally, the publicly owned disposal facilities in the company's operational footprint were conducive for Aspen's growth since they leveled the playing field with some of the more established haulers in the region.

“To this day, Aspen doesn't own any disposal facilities of any kind. We view the business as an execution business and our goal is to be the best hauler in each market where we operate,” Kircher says. “We have high-quality equipment, we maintain it well, and we think we have some of the finest facilities in the business, all of which create an image that customers like and an environment where employees want to work. We have many industry veterans and longtime employees.

“We have a sharp focus on how we execute our business as a hauler. Between public disposal sites and tonnages that give us contractual leverage, we're disposal neutral and embrace the independence

of using facilities that are in the best interest of the customer.”

NEW OPPORTUNITIES

As the company became more established in its Twin Cities home base, Kircher saw openings for the company's services in the Des Moines, Iowa, and St. Louis metro areas.

Rather than acquire existing assets or businesses in each of these regions, the company instead worked to establish itself from the ground up.

“Each of our markets has been entered by starting from scratch. There's a cost to doing it that way, but it allows us to build the company and culture the Aspen way,” Kircher says. “With each new market or facility, we have moved people to new positions and had help from employees across the company. It's demanding work, but it's a fulfilling professional experience for everyone who gets involved in this kind of expansion and growth.”

Aspen Waste, whose business is 80 percent commercial collection and 20 percent residential, currently owns and operates six facilities within the three regions it inhabits: A Minneapolis facility that serves as a primary site for the Twin Cities metro area; an Eagan, Minnesota, operations satellite for the Twin Cities; an Earth City, Missouri, site that is the company's primary location for the St. Louis metro area; a National Stockyards, Illinois, site that is the operations satellite for the St. Louis metro area; its Des Moines primary site for that metro area; and its Ames, Iowa, operations satellite for the state.

In the enterprising spirit that has become a signature of Aspen, the compa-



Aspen Waste has grown to more than 300 employees and \$80 million in annual revenue.

ny has developed a service center in Des Moines where administrative functions are performed on behalf of the entire company.

The service center is where the company has its business mail house and payment processing center, which are services that are often outsourced, Kircher says.

While running the service center takes added oversight from the company's corporate office, Kircher says it has paid dividends in freeing up operators in individual markets to focus on the most important facet of the job—serving the customer.

"We've achieved significant efficiencies by learning how to do [this work] ourselves and building out the capacity to scale it up as we grow so that our local hauling companies can keep their focus on sales, customer service and operations," Kircher says.

Perhaps evidenced by the company's fierce insistence on doing things to its own standards, Aspen has been relatively quiet when it comes to pursuing M&A opportunities.

According to Kircher, the thinking

goes, when you buy a lot of smaller companies with problems, you become one large company with problems.

And even though Aspen has traditionally eschewed acquiring other companies in order to grow, Kircher says it is not opposed to doing so if the business fits in with its strategy.

"Aspen is in a very strong financial position and we're prepared to make an acquisition if the right opportunity comes along in a new or existing market," he says. "We have consistent year-over-year sales-driven growth and we don't put any pressure on ourselves to acquire a company just for the sake of growth. An acquisition has to fit [with the company]."

Despite Kircher's singular vision for building Aspen, no man (and no business) is an island. Alexa Kircher Fang, Kircher's daughter, and Thor Nelson, Kircher's great-nephew, are responsible for all of the day-to-day operations of the company. Together, they have played major roles in propelling the company

beyond its humble origins and will continue to guide the company into the future under Kircher's succession plan that has been in place for several years.

Today, the company boasts a roster of 305 employees, a truck fleet of 225, and generates more than \$80 million in annual revenue—a figure lofty enough to land Aspen in the top 40 of *Waste Today's* Largest Haulers of 2019 list.

"A special statistic to us is how Aspen started in 1990 with one truck and one driver and now we're in *Waste Today's* top 40 with over \$80 million in revenue that's essentially pure organic/sales growth in the hauling business without landfill ownership," Kircher says. "The fact that we've done it in multiple markets is not common, especially at this level. It's a testament to the strength of our core strategy and the quality of people we've been able to hire over the years." **wt**

The author is the editor of *Waste Today* and can be reached at aredling@gie.net.

Form A: Proposal Content Checklist

Instructions: A complete proposal includes the following components and requires signatures from the company's authorized representatives. Incomplete forms, at the City's sole discretion, may not be considered.

- Proposal Cover Letter
- Form A: Proposal Content Checklist
- Form B: Proposer Information Questionnaire
- Form C: Proposer Qualifications Questionnaire
- Form D: Certification of Binding Signature
- Form E: Certification of Independent Proposal Pricing
- Form F: Price Worksheet
- Form G: Itemized Listing of Trucks and Other Collection Equipment
- Form H: Certification of Acceptance of the Draft Agreement or Notification of Proposed Exceptions
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