

INDY Business

Editor 519-662-1082 Ext. 30 • Send your story ideas and suggestions to editor@newhamburgindependent.ca

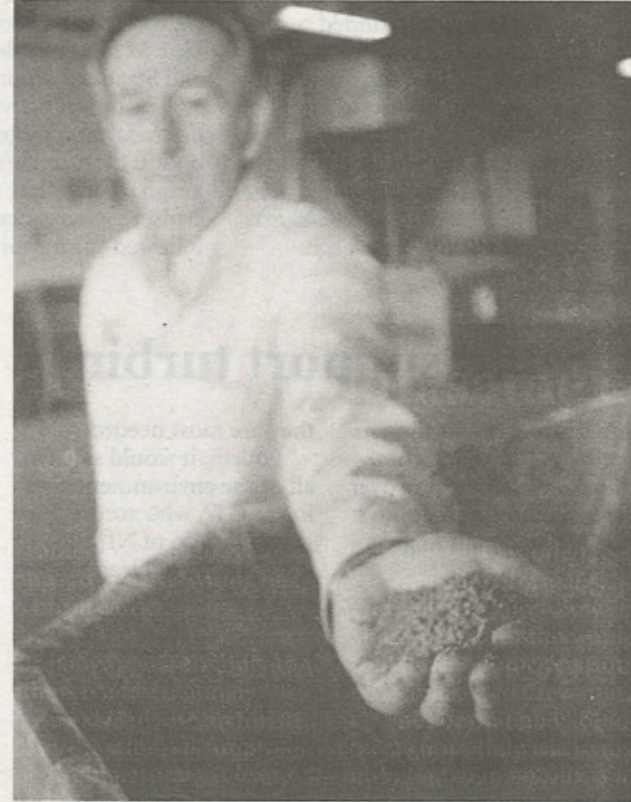
New Hamburg plastics recycling firm forges ahead with new products

Doug Coxson
Independent staff

Six years after launching his innovative agricultural plastics recycling firm Think Plastics, New Hamburg's Chuck Sparks says he's just getting started.

In fact, he's a little perplexed by rumours of the company's early demise. Competitors are beginning to crop up, some spreading rumours and offering what Sparks says is an inferior product. Sparks isn't going any-

where. He's put a lot of money and effort into research and development with a goal of taking the company in new directions. In other ways, not much has changed. Think Plastics still collects bale wrap, brings it to



Think Plastics founder and president Chuck Sparks cups a handful of "crumb," — shredded pieces of agricultural bale wrap the company uses to create baleboard and other products.

its New Hamburg facility and turns it into tiny pieces of shredded plastic called "crumb." The crumb is processed into a durable alternative to wood called baleboard that's used mainly as decking material.

Baleboard costs two to three times more than pressure treated wood, but it's virtually maintenance free and lasts forever according to company marketing material.

There is no organic or composite filler in any of Think Plastics' products, making it resistant to cracking and mold infiltration caused by moisture absorption in similar products.

Since bale wrap has ultraviolet light stabilizers built in, is fungi and mould resistant and doesn't get slippery when wet, it's become a popular material in all types of outdoor applications.

The makers of baleboard, recognized by most Wilmot residents in township installations like the New Hamburg grandstand and bench seating at the

“ We're picking up the province's garbage. Over four million pounds. ”

Chuck Sparks
Think Plastics president

Wilmot Recreation Complex, also earned the contract to create the namesake feature of The Boardwalk, the million-square-foot retail development complex on the west side of Kitchener and Waterloo.

Sparks has found a niche in supplying seating for arenas and grandstands. And he's expanded the use of baleboard in retaining walls, benches, fences and railings. Its flexibility also makes it useful in concrete forms used in foundations and sidewalks.

A lot has happened since the company's bread-and-butter baleboard established the New Hamburg manufacturer as one of Waterloo Region's most innovative companies.

Today Sparks is working on products that use the uncleaned, shredded poly-

ethylene to create other durable products like garbage pails and clothespins, while trying to find a home for them on shelves at major retailers.

Think Plastics has teamed up with a program at Cornell University studying innovative uses of recycled agricultural plastics.

Sparks is also in talks with injection moulding firms eager to test the plastic material in other applications.

But it's the company's environmental track record that has earned the most attention across North America.

As of January, the company had diverted an estimated 3.9 million pounds of scrap agricultural plastic from southern Ontario landfills and burn barrels.

Think Plastics continues to work with most municipal landfills in the area to pick up discarded bale wrap. Last year they collected 46,000 pounds of agricultural plastic from the Crosshill transfer station alone.

"If farmers can't take it to the landfill, they'll bury it or burn it," Sparks says.

Not only that — if the plastic sits around, moisture collects in its folds, making it an ideal mosquito breeding ground.

Think Plastics furthers its environmental record by not trying to wash the collected bale wrap to produce grey water.

Those efforts haven't gone unnoticed.

Over the years, the accolades have piled up.

After earning Heritage Wilmot's environmental award in 2007, the company's recognition as an environmental leader has grown.

Think Plastics earned the 2010 Program Innovation Award from the Pesticide Stewardship Alliance at its annual conference in Savannah, Georgia, recognizing the company for "demonstrating great innovation and tenacity by breaking through marketing barriers for ag plastic film recycling."

In 2009, Durham Region

CONTINUED on Page 1