

Passing The Torch

An interview with Curbside Value Partnership's outgoing executive director and the woman now taking charge.

By Editorial Staff

After a decade of service to the Curbside Value Partnership (CVP) and nearly 40 years in the industry, CVP is bidding farewell to outgoing executive director Steve Thompson. As announced at Plastics Recycling 2014, incoming executive director Keefe Harrison is picking up the reins. During a recent interview, the pair discussed changes to the industry, goals for the organization and opportunities that lie ahead.

Q: CVP was founded to utilize social marketing practices to boost the recovery rates of the most common commodities found in residential curbside programs. Is that an easier task today than it was a decade ago?

Steve: Easier? No, I don't think so. Better understood? Absolutely. CVP's challenge has been to increase recycling rates by developing strategic education campaigns with local communities to increase and improve recovery. It's a respected charter that's picking up speed as more brands and packaging converters look for better ways to ensure their products are recovered.

Keefe: It's important to remember that when we use the term social marketing, we're referring to the study of behavior change. It often gets confused with social media, which refers to tools such as Facebook or Twitter. Changing the public mind-set so recycling is second nature is no



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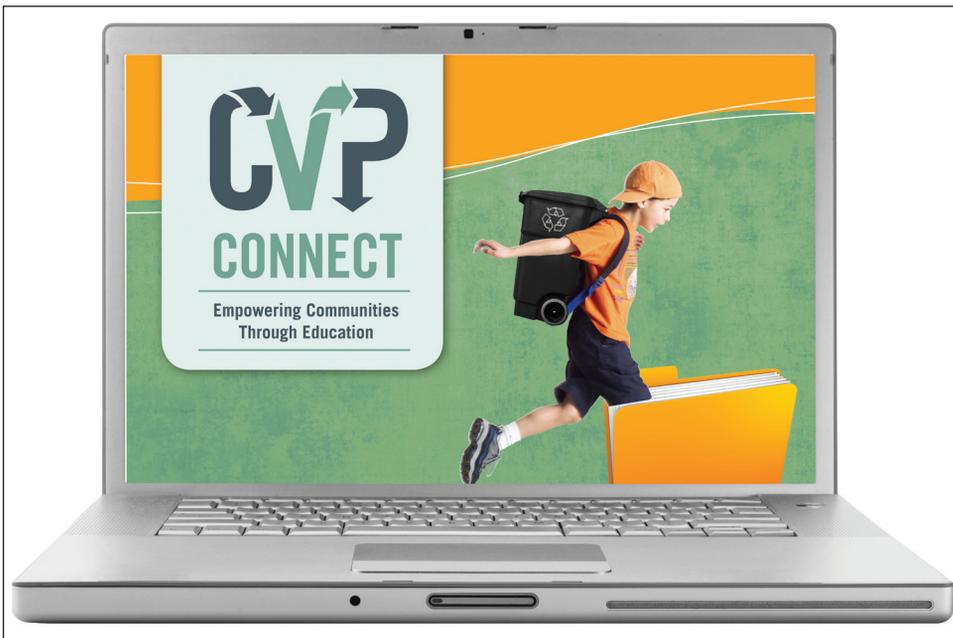
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easy feat but I'm up for it! A decade ago, I was working on North Carolina's RE3.org campaign, an early adopter of social marketing concepts as they apply to recycling. After spending much of my time since then focused on growing public-private partnerships to overcome recycling industry challenges, it's nice to come full circle to an organization where both are important on a national scale.

Q: Keefe, at past Resource Recycling Conferences, you've mentioned that much of your recycling tenure has been spent working across the different sectors. What do you mean by that?

Keefe: Sometimes I feel like a translator, or a marriage counselor, between one step of the recycling process to the next. The recycling industry is a loosely connected yet highly dependent framework. My experience coming from state government to the Association of Postconsumer Plastic Recyclers taught me just how disconnected the public and private sectors can be when it comes to recovery. I believe this reinforces the essential role of collaboration.

Steve: CVP provides a platform for sector specialists, such as can convert-



CVP launched CVPConnect.org in 2012 to serve as a free resource for communities to foster the creation and implementation of strategic education campaigns.

ers, plastics reclaimers, haulers, etc., to maintain their focus while also improving broader recycling. We've seen success in the collaboration that Keefe mentioned, but we know there's still more to be done.

Q: CVP has been regarded as an industry group backed mostly by aluminum. Keefe comes from a heavy plastics recycling back-

ground. Does this signify a shift for the organization?

Steve: CVP has strong support from the plastics industry, especially in recent years. The American Chemistry Council is represented on the board and the Association of Postconsumer Plastic Recyclers is among our list of partners. The Aluminum Associa-



CVP recently partnered with Atlantic County, New Jersey to develop and execute the first comprehensive, county-wide campaign aimed at recycling.

tion and Can Manufacturer's Institute formed the organization, but in order to be fully charged we rely on committed partners across all materials.

Keefe: I believe the ins and outs of plastics recycling change faster than any other material. While that's a sign of a robust, active market, it can lead to confusion among consumers when it comes to recycling their plastic packaging and containers. Clear, concise messages about plastics recycling can help to reduce consumer anxiety about which plastics can make their way into recycling containers.

Q: Steve, talk to us about the industry as it is now. Where do you think the biggest challenges lie? Are those, in effect, also the biggest opportunities?

Steve: We're seeing more interest from retailers and brands than ever before, SERDC 120 [the multi-stakeholder collaborative effort seeking to explore best paths for increased recovery of quality recyclables in the Southeast over a 120-day period] being one example. I view this as good, as it can be a

solid leveraging tool across the entire material supply chain. But that added pressure should be managed wisely. It's easy to oversimplify the factors that have kept our recycling rates at a near-plateau in recent years.

Keefe: At Plastics Recycling 2014, there were many references to supply chain. But the connection to the public sector seems to be missing. It's a bit of an industry enigma – how do you connect with those local government roots? We all know that inevitably, recycling is a behavior occurring at the local level, run by local governments. The good news is that this is precisely why CVP was founded, and that's why we'll continue to push forward. I believe the expanding focus on recycling and cradle-to-grave mentality by the retail industry will be crucial in helping recovery.

Education is a key component of the CVP charter, and I think that sometimes "education" is viewed as a discreet investment to be made – you have a budget, you buy some ads, print some flyers, send out a calendar and you're done. I see education as being

more tied into what drives recovery. It's important to make sure that the infrastructure is in place before conducting education. For example, make sure communities have roll carts and not small bins and that robust MRFs are able to effectively process the materials. That infrastructure may help determine the education needs, at least the immediate ones. New roll carts will be best utilized if provided in conjunction with a solid education campaign so residents embrace the carts and know exactly what to put in them. It's about connecting the dots and I think CVP is in a good position to do what's needed to recover more of all types of recyclable commodities. **RR**

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