

## MEMBER *Profile*

By Michelle Keadle-Taylor



## *Spotlight on*

# Y-YARD AUTO AND TRUCK, INC.



**This is Not  
a Junk Yard; It's  
Our Rose Garden**

It's the philosophy of caring about people that Mike Nolan and his family have used to build Y-Yard Auto and Truck, Inc. It is evident in the attention to detail and design that has been poured into the company since Nolan bought it in 1970.

Located in Effingham, Illinois, Y-Yard has defined itself as a highly efficient and clean salvage yard that sees customers as valuable individuals, not faceless numbers.

"Mike Nolan is the genius behind the organization of the business," says Kelly Roepke, General Manager of Y-Yard and Mike Nolan's daughter. "He designed our warehouse system, making it so easy to follow that even a five-year old can walk through the building and find any part in inventory.

"He's taken great strides to organize the warehouse into a clean, neat facility that has been referred to as the 'Cadillac of salvage yards.' In fact, customers are hard pushed to realize that they are even in a salvage yard."

## We grew up around the place – whether we were mowing the grass, painting fences, or delivering parts and hauling cars on the roll-backs – we did it!

Roepke feels it's going the extra mile for the customer and putting themselves in the customer's shoes that really set Y-Yard apart from other salvage yards. "We're still a Mom and Pop shop," she said, "where customer satisfaction is our number one priority. We spend time chasing small parts that other businesses won't bother with. We spend over two hours doing inventory on each vehicle and will even spend the thirty dollars to have a key cut to check every electrical part in the car to make sure it works and the engine turns over. We take extra care to make sure damaged parts don't end up on the inventory list.

"We also have a tendency to overestimate the damage, which makes our customers happy when they find out it's in better condition than described."

30 years and three more for over 15 years. This wealth of experience offers an additional benefit to customers.

Perhaps it's caring about his own family that inspired Nolan to create a business that makes people feel special and motivated him to offer the best parts at fair prices. Nolan's four daughters were raised around the salvage yard and two of them, Kelly Roepke and Erin Nolan, have chosen to follow in their father's footsteps, managing the family business.

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"It's hard for one of the family to come into an established, family-run business and earn the respect of fellow co-workers," says Roepke. "Erin and I both attended college then came back to help run the business. We grew up in the business and have worked in every department to learn the business inside and out.

"I remember as little girls, we'd go to the auctions with our Dad and always looked forward to stopping at Dairy Queen on the way back. We grew up around the place – whether we were mowing the grass, painting fences, or delivering parts and hauling cars on the roll-backs – we did it!"

Y-Yard, named after the Y intersection down the road, has undergone many changes in the last ten years. Nolan has expanded the business to include four buildings, which house a modern dismantling facility, a spotless office, and more than 45,000 square feet of warehouse space for used parts and equipment that could be damaged by the elements of weather. More than 3,500 late-model vehicles are stored on Y-Yard's now forty-five acre facility.

This growth is quite an accomplishment considering that when Nolan first purchased Y-Yard, it only had a 100-year-old barn that served as the lone warehouse, 60 acres, and 900 older model vehicles.

The harder changes for Nolan have been the technological advances that Y-Yard has made in recent years. In 1986, under the prompting of Tom Clough, sales manager, Y-Yard computerized its inventory. Roepke and Nolan brought further technological advances and soon Y-Yard was selling globally through its Web site. Now, their inventory is bar-coded to reduce error and it is taken using a handheld PC to allow faster processing.

Another distinguishing trait of Y-Yard is the personalized attention each customer receives. Y-Yard customers feel more like they are doing business with a friend because one person works with them from start to finish. The staff takes time and care with each transaction, wanting to make sure all the customer's needs are met. Many times, bigger companies will pass customers to several people within one transaction. Not so at Y-Yard.

Y-Yard has grown from three to 18 employees since Nolan bought it in 1970. Of those 18 employees, three of them have been with the company for over



## Getting the Vehicle Retirement Bill passed is part of our commitment to providing our customers with the best possible service and safety we can.

A digital camera also plays an important role. It allows them to send the customer an e-mail of the actual parts and to store numerous pictures of every vehicle in the system for future use. They also use the latest software to locate parts for customers that they don't have in stock in a matter of minutes.

Y-Yard has several main goals for the next five years. One of them is to continue to offer top-notch customer service through further development of technology. Other goals include increasing sales, and expanding the delivery territory.

But, one lofty, yet attainable, goal reaches beyond Y-Yard. They are committed to getting the Vehicle Retirement Bill (VRB) passed. Y-Yard's determination to drive the VRB forward shouldn't come as any surprise to those who know this family. Their concern for consumer's safety and wanting fair business practices are what motivated Y-Yard to approach the ARA, resulting in the establishment of the Salvage Solutions Committee (SSC) last year.

"One of the latest problems in the industry that we've seen," Roepke said, "is in acquiring salvage. It is becoming this industry's number one problem. People who are purchasing vehicles for the VIN number alone are saturating the market. There are money launderers flooding this market, and the number of salvage vehicles leaving the country continues to climb on a daily basis. This is a growing concern for the general public because too many of these vehicles are being put back on the road that have absolutely no business being there for safety reasons alone!"

The main reason for the VRB is to level the playing field and to focus on consumer safety. It has three main objectives: crush vehicles that have been submerged under saltwater on location, ensure that any vehicle that has a repair estimate that exceeds its actual cash value (ACV) will be retired and used for parts only, and to create three databases."

The first database would require the tracking of all vehicles whose repair estimates exceeded the ACV of that vehicle by 100 percent thus resulting in the VIN to be retired, the second database would track all vehicles considered a total loss but still allowing them to be repaired and rebuilt in the future, and

the third database would track all exported vehicles.

"The objectives of the databases," Roepke said, "would be to track history on these vehicles and educate the public. We hope to make these databases available to everyone through a free Web site. ARA President Jim Watson and the SSC Chair-

man Herb Lieberman have devoted a lot of their time to this crucial subject, and we are just trying to do our part to help out!"

With the help of other salvage yards like the Y-Yard, various consumer groups, and the ARA, Watson and Lieberman are determined to get Congress's attention. They met with politicians in Washington, D.C., in February of this year and since have had numerous meetings with different legislative committees. It is gaining support, as well as nationwide attention.



Y-Yard's Kelly Roepke, left, Mike Nolan, center, and Erin Nolan, right, are committed to getting the Vehicle Retirement Bill (VRB) passed.

"Salvage acquisition is getting more and more competitive," says Roepke. "Some small businesses are going out of business. Business for us has been very good so we can't complain. With the economy not doing so well, many people can't afford new cars. For them, used car parts are still the best option. We are here for them and plan to always be here for our customers. Getting the VRB legislation passed is part of our commitment to providing our customers with the best possible service and safety we can." ♦