



On the Bright Side: Company pulverizes glass to sand in Richfield Springs

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COOPERSTOWN _ When you enter the parking lot at the Andela Tool & Machine Inc. on state Route 28 in Richfield Springs, it's a little bit like being in Oz.

There's no yellow brick road, but the driveway is green and luminous, composed of tiny rounded bits of glass. And along the edge of the drive are hills of shiny green particles.

``We've been taking in a lot of Heineken bottles," Cyndy Andela said as she led a tour of the premises Friday morning.

The bottles, which are trucked to the plant from downstate New York, are run into one end of the Andela's patented Pulverizer. Out the other end come bits of glass dull enough to drive over with thin tires and safe enough for children to use in their sandboxes.

For almost 20 years, Andela and her husband, James, have been pulverizing glass into sand, making a product that can be used in many ways.

Worried about being stuck in the snow this winter? You can grab a 50-pound bag of glass aggregate, and apply it where the wheels are slipping.

For use in snow, you probably want coarse glass bits, and they're also available. By changing the screens in the Pulverizer, the Andelas can change the size of the finished particles from very coarse to fine.

Their play sand, which is washed and then dried at more than 300 degrees, is safer than most other sands because it doesn't contain crystalline silica, a known contributor to the lung disease silicosis, Cyndy Andela said.

Pulverized glass is also highly desirable for sand-blasting, as it doesn't contain coal ash like the traditional agent, ``black beauty," she said.

``The DOT is using it on bridges, and it does an excellent job," she said.

For all its success in Richfield Springs, however, the Andela's glass-recycling operation has faced one challenge. Its richest sources of raw material, the millions of tons of glass discarded in urban areas, are far from its operation.

Now that may change, as the Andelas plan to build a glass-recycling plant in New Jersey next spring.

With the help of Daniel Crowell of Middlefield, they have found venture capitalists willing to back the plan. Crowell is managing director for the Northeast of the Halden Group, a financial- and software-consulting firm based in Virginia, and is running for Otsego County Treasurer as a Democrat.

“When he was with the World Bank, Dan worked on projects that were good for the environment, and he helped us get in touch with the right people,” Cyndy Andela said.

By separating glass from the waste stream, the Andelas are improving the environment, and by making and marketing useful new products, they have the potential to turn a profit on a large scale, Crowell said.

As business expands outwardly, the company's Richfield Springs base should grow as well, for it will become the hub of a regional operation, Cyndy Andela said.

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Cyndy Andela of Andela Tool & Machine Inc. tests the green sand at her Richfield Springs facility Friday.