

Long Island

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LONG ISLAND COMPOST

Charles Vigliotti is very matter-of-fact when describing his company in a nutshell: "Waste material comes in and great stuff comes out," the president and CEO of Long Island Compost said. A simple description of a fairly substantial industrial operation that recycles hundreds of thousands of tons of waste products generated by Long Islanders each year.



Long Island Compost was founded over 30 years ago by Charles Vigliotti (right) and his brothers Dominic (left) and Arnold.

By Kristen D'Andrea

Vigliotti estimates that his company—which employs 150 men and women and operates two yard-waste transfer stations in Westbury (the largest in the nation) and Yaphank—takes in about 300,000 tons of waste product per year and produces five million bags of various garden and consumer products, in return.

Long Island Compost was founded more than 30 years ago as a traditional trash-hauling business by Vigliotti and his brothers Dominic and Arnold.

"We went from moving waste to recycling waste," Vigliotti said.

About 20 years ago, he explained, when landfills were closing and the recycling movement was just beginning, Vigliotti realized that the landscape community was in a bind. "Traditionally, landscape companies would bury their waste—grass clippings and leaves—in landfills. But as the landfills were closing, the landscape community was stuck," he said. Soon Long Island Compost was handling large-scale composting and industrial waste operations.

With this expansion came some opposition from the company's nearest neighbors, who were opposed to the trucks and industrial machines in their backyard. "We came

up with a concept where we could do our work on a smaller scale in many places rather than on a large scale in one location," Vigliotti said. Through its innovative "on-farm" composting program—developed through its partnership with the Long Island Farm Bureau—about 40 East End farmers receive an annual host fee and free compost in exchange for the use of a small parcel of their land for composting.

"Several years ago, Charles Vigliotti and Long Island Compost developed an innovative program that directly benefits Long Island's farming industry while protecting the environment. 'On-farm' composting goes a long way toward reducing off-Island exportation of solid waste," said Joseph Gergela, executive director of the Long Island Farm Bureau.

Another innovative program created by Long Island Compost involves the composting of duck waste on site at the area's duck farms. About 10 years ago, the DEC turned to the company for assistance when excess levels of nitrogen were discovered in the Peconic Bay and South Shore estuary. Local duck farmers were facing extinction when it was realized that the high levels of nitrogen were a direct result of duck manure run-off from local duck farms. The company developed a cost-effective protocol for protecting local waterways while supporting the

duck farmers.

"We bind up the excess nitrogen, remove the material and bring it back to our composting facility—taking the excess nitrogen and putting it to good use," Vigliotti said. "Today, there is a measurable difference in the amount of nitrogen

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leaking into the Peconic Bay [from the duck farms]."

Vigliotti attributes his company's success to an equilibrium created by what he describes as a "smooth moving pipeline."

"As we grew and we took in more yard waste, debris and green waste, we've been able to expand our end-product marketing," Vigliotti said. The company has created three organic lawn-care product lines—which include potting mix, potting soil and mulch—for consumers that can be found at independent garden centers and Home Depots across Long Island,

New Jersey, Connecticut and up-state New York. In addition, Long Island Compost creates custom soil mixes for large urban planting projects that call for strict quality control specifications. Some recent landmark projects that benefited from Long Island Compost include the Battery Bosque Garden in lower Manhattan and New York City's Columbus Circle reconstruction.

In addition to providing its custom soil mixes to charitable organizations, the company provides many of the region's educational institutions and school districts with much-needed compost, topsoil and mulch for improvement of ball fields, playgrounds and flower beds.

During the last few months, Long Island Compost has expanded its composting from grass clippings, leaves and duck waste to include source separated organic wastes. The company has been working on a pilot program with Whole Foods, taking their green waste (such as bruised or excess fruits and vegetables that did not sell) and successfully incorporating it into its on-farm recycling program.

Vigliotti says, "We're composting the waste and, eventually, 100 percent of it is coming back into the marketplace as a superior horticultural product."



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