



By Lisa Readie Mayer

**S**ome barbecue retailers are finding that Greenness is becoming more important to their customers and can sometimes be an influential factor in purchase decisions. While most agree that price and performance still ultimately trump consumers' desire to be environmentally responsible, retailers who adopt a Green philosophy of doing business say it pays off.

## A Chat with Chris Kay

*The owner of three Mr. Grill stores in New Hampshire and Massachusetts recycles used grills because he feels a responsibility to do so.*

**Hearth & Home:** *Do you consider your business a Green company?*

**Chris Kay:** "We didn't set out to be a Green company. We just started doing one thing at a time. It was baby steps. Our town has a recycling program, so we recycle all paper, plastic, metals, cardboard, soda bottles and more at our company headquarters. The electric company has a campaign encouraging everyone to conserve three percent of their fuel use, so we're working on that. We reuse or recycle UPS and FedEx packing materials. All the vehicles in our fleet are tuned up every six months for greatest fuel efficiency. We use an environmentally-friendly linen cleaning company to clean our dirty rags."



Chris Kay.

*From a barbecue standpoint, what specifically have you done to improve your Greenness?*

**Kay:** "When we sell a grill, the question always comes up: Can you take my old grill away? One of our staff members came up with the idea of starting a recycling program for grills. The service is usually free with the purchase of a new grill, and delivery and set-up service. We take the grills back to our shop, break them down and separate the metals into individual bins for aluminum, steel, brass and stainless steel. If someone just wants us to recycle an old grill, we charge a \$55 fee to go to their house

to collect and recycle it.

"Mr. Grill started as a grill cleaning and service business before we started selling grills, and we still clean and service an average of 80 grills a month. So when we make repairs, we end up with a lot of old parts and we recycle those pieces, too. Once or twice a month, we'll bring everything to the scrap metal yard."

*Do you make money on this? And also, do you get many people who take advantage of your grill recycling service even when they're not buying a grill from you?*

**Kay:** "At this point, we don't get many calls from people asking to pay \$55 for us to come to simply recycle their old grill, but

we do recycle an old grill almost every time we sell a new one. We get some money when we turn the metals in for recycling. But it's not a lot, and it's not the only reason for doing this."

*Why do you do it then? Surely it takes a considerable effort on your part?*

**Kay:** "Yes, and it takes up a lot of space for the four pallet-sized bins that hold the metals in our shop. We recycle because we were overwhelmed by the thought of how many grills get dumped in the landfill just here in the Boston area alone. I can't begin to imagine the volume of trashed grills across the country every year. Many grills out there are so cheaply made they wear

out within two or three years at the most. I feel we have a responsibility to do something about that."

*Do you feel your Green efforts are important to your customers and influence their purchase decisions?*

**Kay:** "If a customer mentions they want to buy an inexpensive grill, we tell them it will end up in a landfill in a couple years. When a customer thinks about a big, hulking grill ending up in a landfill, it has a big impact on them. We try to explain that a grill made in the U.S., that's better quality and longer lasting, is a better choice. The fact that the product is made in the U.S.A. is more influential to the customer than whether it's Greener."

*Do you promote your Green business philosophy or your recycling program?*

**Kay:** "We do try to talk about it when we are working with customers, but we have not advertised it. Some towns won't take grills at curbside trash pickups, so we may consider advertising in those communities to offer our recycling service. We may use Constant Contact to reach our current customers about our Green efforts and our grill recycling. We plan to work on this."

*Any final thoughts on the subject?*

**Kay:** "We have focused on things we can implement easily without costing us money. Everyone in our company does their share and gets behind these Green efforts. It all adds up. It's important to try."