

EXPLORING NEW OPPORTUNITIES



*CARDINAL GROUP
CONTINUES ITS GROWTH
AND EXPANSION*

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— Photography by: Rob Wetzler / Wetzler Studios

The Greek philosopher Aristotle said the whole is greater than the sum of its parts, and that is certainly true at Cardinal Group. The company has four divisions—environmental, maintenance, roofing and transportation (known as Greyhound Hauling Express) specializing in transporting non-hazardous wastes—and each one is profitable in its own right.

When combined under the Cardinal Group umbrella, they function like interlocking gears, driving the 63-year-old business forward in support of the overarching goal of continuous expansion and growth.





Ray Brophy,
Chief Executive Officer
of Cardinal Group.

“When the company first began in 1962 under the name of Cardinal Maintenance and Service, the operation was much smaller and only offered janitorial services to commercial and industrial customers,” recalls Ray Brophy, Chief Executive Officer.

As government regulations regarding asbestos hazards and hazardous waste came into effect, the company first added the environmental division and then the roofing division. Over time, the company became known as the one to call when solutions were needed “because we have the expertise to handle them,” says Brandon Skidmore, Chief Operating Officer. “And that has contributed to a lot of our growth.”

It was a company with great potential and a history of superior performance as evidenced by the three awards it had earned from Honda: Service Excellence in 2019, Outstanding Value in 2020 and Challenging Spirit Award in 2021.

But with the then-owner approaching retirement, the interest in growing the business just wasn't there.

“He was looking at dissolving the company, but the three of us saw a lot of opportunities,” says Brian Madden, Chief Financial Officer, who had already been approached by Ray and Brandon to be the third member of a new leadership team. “We wanted to grow and expand the business.”

By the end of 2022, the new leadership team was in place. “I was excited because I wasn't ready to retire,” says Ray. “I feel comfortable working with these guys. It works really well, and I'm having fun.”

Brian adds, “Ray allowed Brandon and me the opportunity to come in here, to shuffle some of the pieces and start to put

the puzzle together. We've brought in new ideas and changed so many things here in the past three years, and that's what has helped Cardinal take advantage of new opportunities.”

One of the first decisions to be made to move the company forward was to purchase the very building where the company was headquartered—a deal that Farmers National Bank helped finance. Next came a streamlining of the company's service offering and the selling off of its safety products distribution business.

A major strength is the company's customer-focused approach, says Brandon. “We strive to anticipate our customers' needs and react swiftly to solve those issues. Being able to respond quickly to unexpected calls from our customers and having the employees who are trained is crucial to our success. With this philosophy, we earn trust and long-lasting relationships with our customers.”

Equally important is the culture of safety that is a critical element of the company. This has resulted in Cardinal Group becoming an A-rated ISN certified company for its focus on safety, procedures and overall culture.

“Safety is the backbone of Cardinal, and all of our employees must live this culture every day,” says Brandon. “We start our days with safety and recognize our employees that go above and beyond to make sure we all live by our commitments.”

A Synergistic Approach to Growth

Cardinal Group is now helmed by a trio disparate in both age and experience—a diversity that has turned out to be one of their greatest assets and another example of the truth of Aristotle's maxim. Each man brings his own unique background experience and style to the team, with Brandon noting, “I truly cannot think of better, more unique and uncommon partners in business.”

Ray has extensive experience and historical knowledge gained from his four decades with the company, which also reinforces the level of trust Cardinal has developed with its customer base over the years. Brandon, who joined Cardinal eight years ago, brings

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a level of technical expertise in the environmental industry as well as experience in sales and operations leadership, including opening the company's first field office in 2019 outside of Columbus, Ohio.

The newest member of the Cardinal family, Brian, has extensive experience in both materials processing and transportation, along with a knowledge of executive financial leadership. He also has a history of successfully leading and selling multiple business ventures.

"The three of us truly respect each other," says Brandon. "Together we're focused on growing this business and providing opportunities for our staff that continue to excel and move up."

"They complement one another," says Senior Vice President, Mike Mudrak, Cleveland Market President at Farmers National Bank. "They have different backgrounds, but they have been able to successfully make it all work as the new owners."

Their diversity coupled with a collaborative spirit serves them well, especially when a major change, such as opening a division in South Carolina, was being considered. The South Carolina expansion, which encompasses Gray Court and Charleston, is centered around Cardinal's Transportation and Environmental divisions.

Initially, it began with transportation to meet



Brian Madden, Chief Financial Officer of Cardinal Group.

the needs of customers and offer unique services such as walking floor trailers moving alternative fuels from production facilities to kilns who use it as an alternative to coal. Next came an opportunity to provide material processing of wood waste to support the alternative fuels industry.

Customer Service Drives Farmers

"Brian's experience and his knowledge of grinders, screeners and sizing equipment

proved pivotal in the success of our materials processing services in South Carolina," Brandon says. When it came to financing the equipment and expansion of the environmental services in that location, the company again turned to Farmers for their needs.

Regarding their decision to choose Farmers as their financial institution, Brandon says, "We needed a banking partner that was excited and driven to support Cardinal and our growth goals. Farmers has been pivotal to our expansion of field offices in South Carolina, Tennessee and Alabama. Mike Mudrak makes it easy to do business, offering fast access to the financing we need to be able to support this growth. He is upfront with his guidance but truly comes from a place of aiming to support our business."

Ray agrees, adding, "Farmers has been an integral part of our strategic growth and is phenomenal to work with."

A Multi-State Operation

While Cardinal Group began in Akron, Ohio as a maintenance business, it has since grown into a multi-division company with six field offices located in Ohio, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Alabama.

"We offer a full line of environmental services from industrial cleaning to material sizing and processing, and transportation of waste and products east of the Mississippi. We're also one of the largest commercial



Brandon Skidmore, Chief Operating Officer of Cardinal Group.



"THERE ARE DEFINITELY CHALLENGES, BUT AT THE END OF THE DAY WE CAN ALL LAUGH ABOUT THEM."

roofing companies in northeast Ohio," says Brandon. "In recent years, we have grown into material processing to support alternative fuel production as well as highly technical industrial cleaning projects that have allowed customers to keep their equipment operational, reduce downtime and increase production."

In some instances, Cardinal Group has also taken on a conduit role, connecting two unrelated companies, "Each one having something the other needs," says Brian. "By transporting the waste generated by one customer and delivering it to another who needs that type, both customers benefit and the waste is not going into a landfill," he explains, adding, "We're constantly trying to think of new, innovative ideas."

"Another one of our strong suits is that, when we're on site, we see opportunities where we can help our customers solve a potential problem or offer a solution to an existing problem that they have, and we bring that to their attention," adds Brandon. "We pick up business because we're offering solutions that maybe they're not aware of, but because of our knowledge in other areas, we have the ideas and can present them to our clients."

An Interlinking Set of Divisions

At first glance, the four divisions that make up Cardinal Group seem like an unrelated group, with no discernible connection

to each other. As Brandon explains, it's Cardinal's broader focus on sustainability and circular economics that drives the company's strategic vision.

"For example, in our industrial cleaning we focus on removing waste or cleaning equipment so that production facilities can maximize their resource efficiency, reducing waste scrap and downtime," he says. "It's the same with our material processing. We provide a grinding, sizing, processing service for wood previously going to landfill to move it to a beneficial reuse instead of the traditional take, make, dispose model. This method of circular economics drives everything we do."

An Eye on the Future for Cardinal Group

There's no denying that in the few years they have been leading Cardinal Group, Ray, Brian and Brandon have brought the company forward; but the trio is not interested in resting on their laurels. They have plans for the company to continue its upward trajectory, including increasing the number of employees by 25 percent. Equally important is their commitment to the communities in which they

have a presence through volunteering, sponsorships and support.

"We continue to meet and exceed our strategic goals year over year," says Brandon, "and our growth and expansion are a testament to this."

It's obvious the three men operate as a unified team when it comes to making the final decisions. It's a synergistic approach that served them well when they began this leadership journey and will continue to do so as they develop the future for Cardinal Group.

Through all the changes, they have maintained a positive relationship and team attitude, notes Ray. "There are definitely challenges, but at the end of the day we can all laugh about them."

Adds Brandon, "All of us have a vision to grow and continue to run a company that provides opportunities for our employees. Each of us hold integrity first and then the ability to inspire and motivate our employees second. The best thing about Cardinal is we all enjoy our work, and we strive to create the same environment for our employees." 



WORKING TOGETHER TO GROW THE BUSINESS

As so often happens in the business world, the connection between Cardinal Group and Farmers National Bank came about through referrals. In 2022, Ray Brophy, Brandon Skidmore and Brian Madden took over the company from the owner who was retiring and formed a new executive leadership group.

One of their first objectives was to find a banking partner that would support their plans to grow the company. As Ray, Chief Executive Officer, recalls, the men had reached out to their network of businesses in the area for recommendations, and Farmers kept coming up as the financial institution they should consider.

Since then, says Ray, Farmers has been “an integral part of our strategic growth,” with Mike Mudrak, Senior Vice President and Cleveland Market President at Farmers, their main point of contact.

“He’s excited to help us reach our growth goals,” says Brian, Chief Financial Officer. “He’ll say, ‘This is what you need and this is how Farmers can help.’ He’s just easy to talk to.”

One of the first projects for which they needed financing was purchasing the existing Akron headquarters that they had been leasing from the previous owner.

Subsequently, Farmers also worked closely with the trio as they expanded Cardinal’s footprint, including opening a division in South Carolina, overseen by Brian who is also the company’s Chief Financial Officer. Financing was needed to purchase equipment, which Mike arranged as expeditiously as possible.

“Most of our customers are in our service area, and therefore, financing is usually local,” says Mike. “However, we do have some clients, like Cardinal Group, with satellite locations outside of our footprint, so we entertain those requests, too.”

As the company continues to grow, Farmers assists them with their financial needs and requirements, providing lines of credit, building loans and deposit and treasury management services.

The relationship has been positive for both, as the bank and Cardinal Group have worked as a team to achieve the company’s goals. From Mike’s perspective, the company is unique in how the four divisions are interlinked. While each division—environmental, maintenance, roofing and transportation—operates independently, they can also collaborate with each other to meet a customer’s needs or expand their services.

Talking about the trio whose history with Cardinal runs from 40 years for Ray to eight for Brandon and just three for Brian, Mike says, “It’s interesting how their different backgrounds work together. Ray, having been there the longest, is a connection to the original company, while Brian and Brandon, being comparative newcomers to the business, bring fresh perspectives and ideas. At the same time, they complement one another, with each one bringing a specific set of strengths and expertise to the table. It’s an interesting dynamic that serves the company well.”

