



Hi everyone, welcome to Waste360's NothingWasted! Podcast. On every episode, we invite the most interesting people in waste recycling and organics to sit down with us and chat candidly about their thoughts their work this unique industry and so much more so thanks for listening and enjoy this episode.

[INTRO MUSIC]

Liz: This week's guest is 9-year-old, Ryan Hickman of Ryan's Recycling. This little entrepreneur has won multiple awards for his recycling efforts. He's been recognized on the Ellen Show and other big news outlets and he's super passionate about the waste and recycling industry. He has lofty goals too. He wants to clean up the oceans help the animals and save the planet. Not too shabby for nine years old huh? Well Ryan is certainly a breath of fresh air and part of what makes this industry so special. I hope you enjoy this conversation and I hope that Ryan inspires you the way he inspired us and how he's inspiring people around the world. Give a listen.

Liz: Hi everyone, this is Liz Bothwell from Waste360 with Ryan Hickman, The Young Wonder and CEO of Ryan's Recycling. Welcome Ryan and thanks for being on the show.

Ryan: Thank you.

Liz: And thanks to your dad Damian for being with us as well. So, Ryan, wow, you have quite a story to tell. You started recycling at three and a half. I heard. Could you tell us a little bit about that experience? Well yeah.

Ryan: When I was three and a half years old my dad took me to the local recycling center for the first time and I loved it and I just wanted to keep doing it, I thought it was fun. And later I realized the recycle of saving the planet. And I just wanted to keep doing it more and more. And I'll probably just keep recycling.

Liz: Oh, good for you. That's amazing. So, can you share how many cans and bottles you've recycled so far?

Ryan: I have recycled over half a million cans and bottles.

Liz: Holy moly! That's amazing.

Ryan: Thank you.

Liz: Hey, do you think you'll hit one million someday?

Ryan: Yeah!

Liz: Yeah, I think you will.

Ryan: Maybe 2 million, 3 million, 4 million.

Liz: Oh wow. You probably will. That's amazing. You are only nine years old and you've recycled that many. Thank you for doing that.

Ryan: You're welcome!

Liz: So, Ryan how does your family help you with your business?

Ryan: Well on the weekends or if I have a bunch on a weekday and I get home, we may sort. Like my dad will help me. He usually drives me to pick up the cans and help do the heavy lifting and stuff and every Tuesday, my grandma picks me up from school I usually go to the YMCA as after school daycare. But then, my grandma picks me up on usually on Tuesdays, I shimmy sort the cans of bottles that we have. And yes. And my mom helps sort lots of things too, usually on the weekend.

Liz: That's great. So, you have everyone helping you look at way to do it and this industry is filled with so many family businesses. So, I think it's great that you're giving everybody the help you.

Ryan: Thank you.

Liz: So, I saw one of your YouTube videos, I love your channel by the way. And your friend George from the country club where you get their bottles and cans too. He was saying that he's never even seen an adult who's as focused as recycling as you are. That's awesome. So, Ryan, does it feel like work to you?

Ryan: It kind of feel like work, but at that same time it doesn't. I guess it's fun but at the same time at work but it's not. I don't really know if it's work or not.

Liz: It's hard work and you're doing so much. It's pretty amazing what you're doing. And you seem to really love animals and care about the planet too. So, you donate to a marine mammal center right?

Ryan: Yes, I donate all the money for my t-shirts to the Pacific Marine Mammal Center in Laguna Beach California.

Liz: And what made you pick that place?

Ryan: I just wanted to pick up because I knew that that seals and sea lions and we went out a couple times and I just chose it. And so, it just stuck with me and I kept donating money for my t-shirts.

Liz: Oh, that's amazing. Do you know how they used the money to help those animals?

Ryan: Yeah like they may buy new equipment to help rescue the animals, they may buy food and medicine, fish, pedalyte. That type of thing.

Liz: Oh, wow that's so you're really helping them on a day to day basis.

Ryan: One dollar equals one pound of fish!

Liz: Is that right?!

Ryan: If they use it towards the fish, one dollar equals one pound of fish.

Liz: Oh, wow that's amazing.

Ryan: And I don't even like almost \$9,000... I have given the seals sea lions. If they used it all for fish, it will be almost 9,000 pounds of fish.

Liz: Wow that's amazing.

Ryan: I could definitely not lift that much!

Liz: Oh no that would be really heavy. Yeah... Major muscles and you might need a truck for that huh?

Ryan: Yeah.

Liz: That's awesome. Good for you now. Have you ever seen them release any of those animals into the wild?

Ryan: Yes, I've seen lots of releases. Actually, I think it was last weekend that they did at least, two weekends ago my dad says, and they were releasing 14 animals but one wanted to stay in it's portable crate that they carry out so only 13 went. They tried and tried but the last one wouldn't go. So they were going to release him by boat.

Liz: Oh, that's a good idea. I guess he liked where he was for now.

Ryan: Yeah. That was like one of the most times that they released that many animals.

Liz: Yeah that's a lot in one shot.

Ryan: They usually release two to four animals.

Liz: Oh, you really saw a big one. Wow.

Ryan: Yeah, like two went and then everybody just followed behind that one except for that one.

Liz: Wow.

Ryan: I think its name was Florence.

Liz: Oh that's very cute. Hey, Florence wanted to go another way huh?

Ryan: Yes, I guess he didn't want to go swim. I mean, she!

Liz: Hey maybe she'll find them out there once she's released by boat.

Ryan: I think she is already released.

Liz: Oh, good. So are you still doing lots of beach cleanups?

Ryan: Yes. This weekend June 1st, I am actually during a beach cleanup in Carlsbad with some third graders, 3 third grade classes with their parents.

Liz: So that's really nice. So, did you organize that Ryan?

Ryan: Me & my dad did.

Liz: Oh, that's great. And they're going to help you clean it up?

Ryan: Yes. This will be about 100 people there at 1 Waters Beach in Tamarack State Park Beach.

Liz: Oh you're gonna really do a great job with that many people. So, what's the weirdest mystery item that you've found so far on the beach? I saw you showed one that your dad found a little soccer ball. What's the weirdest one you've seen?

Ryan: Probably a head of a Barbie!

Liz: Oh, that must have been weird.

Ryan: No body, just the Barbie doll head! It was just laying there...

Liz: Like a horror movie or something.

Ryan: Yeah, that's definitely going to be my mystery item.

Liz: Yes. Oh, that's a weird one.

Ryan: I wonder what my mystery for San Diego is going to be!

Liz: Oh you have to let us know, now we will be curious.

Ryan: Maybe I'll see who has a crazy item out of all the people.

Liz: Right. With that many people you don't you might add quite a few.

Ryan: Yeah. I wonder what we will find. Once I found two shotgun shells.

Liz: Oh wow. I wouldn't even have thought of that.

Ryan: I know. We were just walking back to do a video. Then all of a sudden, we just saw them laying on the ground in the sand.

Damion: A lot of flip flops, sunglasses.

Liz: Oh, I bet.

Ryan: Beach today's.

Liz: A lot of plastic, I bet.

Ryan: Yeah.

Liz: I bet

Ryan: Lots of Styrofoam.

Liz: Oh yeah.

Ryan: I can't get the Styrofoam to get these teeny, tiny balls. And I would spend my hours picking up each individual one.

Liz: Oh wow.

Ryan: But I try to get most of it. That's one thing I could grab.

Liz: Oh you use one of those grabber things?

Ryan: Yeah. Because it's usually mixed in with all seaweed and stuff.

Liz: Oh that's smart. That's a good way to do it.

Ryan: So, I'm not touching anything goes right.

Liz: Oh, you have it down to a science. Good for you.

Ryan: Thank you.

Liz: Now I also saw that you recently toured the Athens services facility.

Ryan: Yep. I did just tour Athens service facility like two months. Yeah about two months ago in LA.

Liz: OK. How was that? Were you surprised by anything that you saw there?

Ryan: It was actually pretty clean.

Liz: Oh OK.

Ryan: And it's smelt really good. It's smelled different than you would have expected it to.

Liz: Oh that's good.

Ryan: Yeah. It was actually pretty cool, and I got to dump lots of cans on a conveyor belt. I would dump this whole a plastic bag. Then I would go to the other conveyor belt is and would dump all the cans. Like it was weird. I know those cans back and to go.

Liz: That is so cool.

Ryan: I know. And there was this little like spider robot arm that's like a suction cup and then plastic bottles and plastic things will go through but if it seems like maybe can, it will pick it up and do and toss out to the side. Or like a blueberry container, it will pick it up and toss it inside.

Liz: Oh that's so cool. I've heard about these robots that are helping with recyclables and they really they do a good job sorting and get rid of getting rid of the contaminated ones right?

Ryan: Yeah. But sometimes it messes. Sometimes it will grab it but then it does not get on it good enough and it just falls off.

Liz: Oh OK.

Ryan: So sometimes it misses but not that often. It probably missed five times when I was looking at it.

Liz: That's so cool that you got to see that in action.

Ryan: Yeah it is. It looked very cool.

Liz: I bet. Oh that's neat.

Ryan: I've never seen anything like it.

Liz: Oh, that's great. I can't wait to go. I'll fill you in if I go, I think I'm gonna go pretty soon to see one of those robots in action. So, I've also seen some of your YouTube videos where you're reading the letters that you get. You get a ton of mail.

Ryan: Kind of yeah. Like today I got a letter from Korea.

Liz: Oh my goodness, really? Was it from another child or a teacher?

Damion: High school

Ryan: High school.

Liz: Oh wow.

Ryan: Long letter.

Liz: Oh. Oh, so you have to read that one.

Ryan: My dad just read it for me because when we got home we checked the mail and it was in it.

Liz: Oh, that's neat. Are they interested in what you're doing over here?

Ryan: Yes.

Liz: I bet. What do you like most about getting those letters?

Ryan: I think as hearing that they're inspired by me or something like that.

Liz: Yeah. No, they are I think you're inspiring a lot of people, Ryan. So, have you met other young entrepreneurs who are doing something or doing cool things like you are?

Ryan: Yes I met a couple, like my friend Campbell. He lives in Australia and he makes teddy bears for kids with cancer in hospitals.

Liz: Oh nice.

Ryan: And Chloe from Chloe Cares. She's my friend. She lives in Yorba Linda, California. And she makes homeless bags and passes them out. I just did a bad pass out like two weekends ago too.

Liz: Oh, you did? With her bags?

Ryan: Yeah, like maybe two-three months ago, I helped pack a couple bags and she sews her own bags and I saw some of those bags that I helped pack.

Liz: Oh, how neat is that!

Ryan: And there were just enough homeless people. So like right when I was laying our bags there's no more homeless people in line.

Liz: Oh, you guys planned that perfectly.

Ryan: We actually that we knew how many people were going to be there. But Chloe just said OK I've got bags.

Liz: Perfect. Oh, that's great.

Ryan: Yeah.

Liz: That's a really nice thing to do. So, you've been on The Ellen Show and other popular shows too. Was Ellen funny?

Ryan: Yes. She is actually kind of funny. She is very generous. It kinda goes with her last name... Degeneres.

Liz: Oh true.

Ryan: Because she's in this humongous \$10,000 check and a mini car.

Liz: Oh how cool is that. Was it a regular car?

Ryan: A mini car that kids could drive.

Liz: How cool is that.

Ryan: It said Ryan's Recycling on it. So yeah, it was pretty cool.

Liz: Well hey, now you have your own car. How cool is that. So, do you get recognized more now since you've been doing this?

Ryan: Yeah. Yeah, I kinda get recognized more.

Liz: And are you a little bit of a celebrity at your school?

Ryan: Yeah kind of.

Liz: Oh, that's crazy.

Ryan: All the teachers know me. Like from their classes. They would like a bag outside and when a kid is done with the water bottle, they will go and put it in the bag. And like every Tuesday will come and pick up the cans. Like yesterday I just picked them up.

Liz: Oh wow, so you're really having an influence there. They're all kind of in a routine now.

Ryan: I was like six seven six or seven teachers with their cans outside and they even their cans from home too.

Liz: Oh wow. See, you're really making an impact. You're actually changing behavior, Ryan! That's great.

Ryan: And my first-grade teacher was actually the first person. She was not only the first person to interview me. She made me into the San Juan Capistrano Dispatch for Earth Day.

Liz: Whoa oh really.

Ryan: It was a local newspaper.

Liz: Good for you.

Ryan: She made the first interview thing happen for me.

Liz: Oh she did, so she really loved what you were doing for the planet and wanted to share that with the community. Oh yeah for you. Do you still keep in touch with her?

Ryan: Yeah. I still go to the same school. At recess, I help her out. Right now, I'm taking lots of things down from the wall because schools is almost out for us. We had like six more days.

Liz: Oh, how lucky for you. And then what do you what are you thinking for the summer? Was that when you can do recycling more will you take a vacation or anything?

Ryan: Well to be traveling a lot for my recycling. I'll be going, I know these places Alaska, probably New York and Vancouver and when I'm not traveling, I'll be at my grandma's house.

Liz: Oh, that's nice too.

Ryan: Yes, because she has a really fun neighbors.

Liz: Oh, she does.

Ryan: Which I played with them all the time.

Liz: Oh, you're going to have a great summer.

Ryan: I always have a good summer.

Liz: Oh, you're really looking forward to that. And I love that you're recycling is taking you to those really neat places like Alaska, New York and Canada.

Ryan: Yeah.

Liz: Are you keeping track of every move all of your travels?

Ryan: Kind of. I know one like all the places I got to, like I've been to New York, Vancouver, Canada. I've been to about twelve states.

Liz: Oh yeah. That's pretty good at nine. So Ryan, what advice would you give to other people who want to start their own business? Even other kids or adults since you seem to really do a great job.

Ryan: I think I would probably tell them... I'm only nine and if a nine year old could do this anybody could do it.

Liz: So, wait I have to ask... Did you really take over LeBron's Instagram?

Ryan: Yeah, for a day.

Liz: What did you post on there that day?

Ryan: Yeah, I think one of videos.

Liz: That's really cool, that's awesome that you have fans like that. So are you still saving for a garbage truck?

Ryan: Yes. I'm still saving for a garbage truck. My parents still want me to save for college.

Liz: What do you think, dad?

Damion: We'll see when he's 18. Well see if he still wants a garbage truck. Hopefully somebody will offer a way for him to go to college for free.

Ryan: I'm only 9, I have 9 more years!

Liz: Very good point Ryan.

Ryan: Because I'm going to be turning 10 in July.

Liz: That's double digit. That's pretty cool.

Ryan: Yeah.

Liz: You might have to celebrate while you're traveling.

Ryan: I don't think I'll be gone when it's my birthday.

Liz: Oh that's nice too.

Ryan: Because I'll be going to Vancouver at the end of June. I think I will be back for my birthday.

Liz: Oh OK.

Ryan: Then I'm going to Alaska at the end of July.

Liz: And maybe a birthday gift to you will be more people recycling right? So, what do you like to do outside of recycling when you're not working so hard?

Ryan: I usually coin collect, ride my bike, watch YouTube. I play my violin.

Liz: Wow. So, you have a lot going on.

Ryan: Yep.

Liz: And then I would just want to ask your dad a question. So, when did you realize, Damion? When did you realize how serious Ryan was about all of this?

Damion: You know when he was three and he got started we, you know, we just went to our local recycling center with like two small kitchen bags of plastic water bottles and he loved doing it. And I let him keep the money and we probably got three, I don't think we got five bucks, we kind of got like three dollars. And so, he loved doing it and he asked if we could go back the next day and I had to explain to him I go well we don't really have any more cans or bottles to recycle but you know maybe in a month. And so, he went around to all of our neighbors and said I'll be back on Friday to get your cans and bottles. And so all of our neighbors started saving all the cans of bottles for him. And then, you know, I didn't I mean its kind of a new thing for us though we weren't sure if he is like he'll be done with us in about a week or a month.

But Ryan is very focused, he gets his thing happens to be recycling, obviously, but pretty much anything like his coin collecting. He gets super focused on it so it seems normal to us that he would take it as far as he's gone. And then it's, you know, it's always tell people it's like a snowball. Once it got takes on a life of its own, you know, from the recycling to he's got. he probably has two hundred customers that they don't call it all of them every weekend but there's always driving around on the weekends and then he gets tons of email. So, it's you know it's fun to see what people are doing all around the world. You know, they he you know he gets the e-mails and letters from classes. So, there's always something going.

Liz: Oh, that's amazing. And you think Ryan, it's so great to have your family support right.

Ryan: Yeah. It is really good that my family supports me, so I have more help.

Liz: Exactly. And look great life lessons and I mean even learning to save whether it's for a garbage truck or college whatever you guys decide. These are amazing lessons learned at a very young age.

Damion: Well you know we've been I don't know if we've been surprised necessarily but I've seen Ryan is really good at geography and he's really good at math. I know the math is from recycling and going to the bank and you know, counting the receipts and all that stuff and then the geography just happen to be on his wall and he put pins in it from all the people that sent him e-mails and interviews that he's done. He has a thousand pins in it, but he knows every state, I think he pretty much knows every country in the world I can name pretty much any place on the globe any can name like three or four adjoining countries right next to it. So, it's definitely helped for geography and math.

Liz: Wow. I bet. And the concrete way to learn, right? So it really sticks.

Damion: Yeah.

Liz: Oh that's great. That's awesome. Now Ryan, what do you want to be when you grow up? Do you want to stay in this industry?

Ryan: Now we just keep recycling and recycling and recycling until my back can't really bend that much and I'll just in recycling some more, like the bottle in the recycling bin.

Liz: There you go. And pay. You might be able to hire more help by then too and give your back a little bit of a rest.

Ryan: Yeah. That's will probably be me when I'm older, like well like maybe something like 90ish or something.

Liz: That would be a good time to do that.

Ryan: Yeah, I am only 9... I have like 80 more years.

Liz: Exactly. And think about it if you keep doing this, if you've already done half a million imagine by then how many bottles and cans you will have recycled.

Ryan: I know. It will probably be maybe a hundred million, I bet maybe less somewhere around there maybe.

Liz: I bet you could do whatever you set your mind to.

Ryan: Yeah. I bet I could.

Liz: And I know the animals and the mammals can't thank you but thanks for all you're doing to keep all of this out of the oceans as well. Now it seems you've inspired so many people, Ryan. Is there a way that more people can hear from you? Do you want to share your website or your Facebook page or anything?

Ryan: Well my website is RyansRecycling.com. You buy a t shirt, all the money goes to an Pacific Marine Mammal Center. And my Instagram is Ryan's Recycling. And please follow me on Instagram and Facebook.

Liz: OK. Well we are at WasteExpo and Waste360. We are so happy that you're doing this and trust us, that the entire industry is thankful for you and your family and all that you're doing. So, thank you for helping the planet, all the animals and our industry, Ryan.

And this has been awesome. So please keep doing what you're doing and inspiring us all to recycle and help our planet.

Ryan: OK.

Liz: Thanks Ryan. It's been great talking to you and let me know how your beach cleanup goes. And I will let you know how things go on this end. I think you're inspiring me to do my own beach cleanup.

Ryan: Ok. I'll definitely let you know what my mystery is.

Liz: Yes I need to know.

Ryan: Hopefully it will be crazier than the Barbie head.

Liz: I think you probably will with 100 people helping you. The odds are pretty good that it's going to be really weird.

Ryan: Yeah.

Liz: Alright, have fun Ryan and thank you so much for spending so much time with us.