

From the Jacksonville Business Journal:

<https://www.bizjournals.com/jacksonville/news/2017/02/02/jax-based-rare-earth-metals-recycler-receives.html>

Jax-based rare earth metals recycler receives national attention

Feb 2, 2017, 2:31pm EST

Urban Mining — the first Northeast Florida company to get a prestigious B Corp. certification for environmental and social responsibility — is looking to grow its company while also growing its stewardship.

The Jacksonville-based tech company specializes in refurbishing and recycling electronic equipment, securely destroying any data that might be stored before either selling the device at a reduced price or sending the materials back to manufacturers to be reused.



JENSEN WERLEY

Click through the gallery to see inside Urban Mining.

But doing so in a sustainable way, said CEO Steven Kaufman, is part of the company's foundation, ever since founder Juan Carlo Villatoro left El Salvador and started a business that would right some of the waste he had seen in his home country.

After Villatoro founded Urban Mining in 2010, Kaufman — whose background is in entrepreneurship and investment — wanted to get involved.

“When I looked for the deal, I was inspired by Juan Carlos,” Kaufman told the Business Journal. “He has a passion for the environment and corporate responsibility. So when we did the deal, the committed to get the B Corp. certification, which I think gave Juan Carlos comfort that when I came in I was keeping that mentality.”

The B Corp. certification is issued by global nonprofit B Labs and only 5,000 companies across all verticals have been able to meet the rigorous standards of the award.

“They dig deeply into how you operate to get your certification,” said Kaufman. “They look at wage disparity between your lowest and highest paid employee, your mix of employment, etc. And I realized we were the first company in Northeast Florida to do it.”

Having that certification — and the fact that the company offers unparalleled service, Kaufman said — is what has gotten Urban Mining enterprise level customers like Florida Blue and Acosta to handle their data destruction and electronic recycling. UF Health and Borland-Groover are also clients.

“These companies are at the tip of the spear on understanding the risk and importance of properly disposing of equipment for data security,” Kaufman said. “And the B. Corp certification is our Good Housekeeping seal.”

In addition to environmental responsibility, the company also hires 80 percent of its staff from Lutheran Social Services, an organization that supports and integrates refugees.

“Today, it’s like refugees are referred to as a bad thing,” said Kaufman, “but I love the fact that around here it’s like the United Nations and that 45 percent of our employees are women in tech. They all have an opportunity to learn something they couldn’t at a company that pays a living wage.”

In addition to its core business of refurbishing or recycling electronic equipment, Urban Mining has started growing a second line of business using proprietary technology to sustainably recover precious metals and rare earth materials from the circuit boards they recover. Given that there are only about four major companies that perform that service, Kaufman said, it’s almost never performed in an environmentally conscious way, but Urban Mining thinks it’s found a way to do so. The company is now working on a public-private partnership with the University of Florida to perform research on the recovery technology Urban Mining developed.

Looking ahead, Kaufman said the business hopes to grow significantly this year. If the company got two more enterprise-level clients, it would double its business.

“We really have a fierce commitment to being an environmentally friendly and socially responsible company,” said Kaufman. “Part and parcel, we have a commitment to where we work and where we live.”

Jensen Werley

Reporter

Jacksonville Business Journal

