

and 601, "virtually out the back gate at Lake of the Woods."

Back at his office, Rolfe pores over budget figures. This year he estimates we'll sell \$78,000 in recyclables and we'll spend \$90,000 to run the program. "That's actually not bad," he says. "A program that breaks even or actually makes money is pretty amazing." Add to that the serendipitous effect. "It IS worth it," insists Rolfe.

"For every ton of newspaper or glass or aluminum that's not going into the landfill, there's an avoidance cost there. I've saved space in the landfill, and that landfill lasts me longer." By the way, if you're wondering where our recycled material goes; it is hauled to a middle man in Culpeper, who sifts and sorts it again before sending it on its way to those who actually convert and reuse it.

Rolfe continues, "The whole problem with recycling is it's dependent on the market. As an individual locality, you can't do anything to control that market. The

last thing you want to see is you spending your efforts recycling and finding out that someone ended up throwing it in a landfill two counties over."

Rolfe is a firm believer in recycling—as we all should be. He wants county government and schools to spearhead an effort to recycle more, and that's one of the reasons we have a recycling coordinator. "Make it easier for everybody," he continues. "We feel that we need to set an example." He points to a stack of white bond paper on his desk. "The amount of paper we throw away a day is phenomenal."

This year's solid waste budget stands at \$2.5 million, up a cool million from last year's. That's because we squirreled away \$800,000 to be ready for 2012, when the current cell in the landfill must be capped and closed. Before that day

arrives, Orange County's solid waste system will fundamentally change... from a landfill to a transfer station, "and be hauled to a landfill somewhere else." Outta sight, outta mind.

Rolfe ticks off the many reasons we are doing this. The current cell was started in the early 1990s, prior to regulations mandating that all new landfills be lined with plastic and have a leachate drainage and treatment system. "Open

groundwater," says Rolfe.

In accordance with regulations, test wells have been sunk all around the landfill to monitor this groundwater. Some of these wells test marginally. "Fortunately, there are none in the direction of the well over there by RSA," says a relieved Rolfe. "The groundwater is not flowing in that direction."

Here's another reason for not expanding the current landfill: new landfills cannot be located within five miles of an airport; ours is located within 500 yards of one. "Landfills attract birds and birds and airplanes don't go real well together," explains Rolfe.

Actually we have two three-acre cells yet to develop, but they are separated by a stream and wetlands (whenever you see the word "wetlands" all kinds of warning bells and whistles go off), and the water table is shallow here. So, we can't dig too deep, and with these new regulations requiring a packed clay liner, plus 50 mils of plastic, plus a leachate drainage system, "By the time you're said and done, you're digging a hole and filling it back in six feet with all the stuff that goes in before you can throw your first drop of trash on it." Besides,

it costs a quarter of a million dollars for every acre of landfill you prepare.

And then, because you only have a three-acre cell, you can't build very high. Trash trucks must be able to negotiate the slope. "The alternative was to go out and start a new landfill, and that didn't seem to be a real good idea either." Rolfe peers over the top of his glasses with an "if you get my drift," expression on his face. Translation: finding a new landfill site is a political nightmare.

The transfer station is looking better and better every day. Garbage trucks will dump their contents onto a "floor," where a front-end loader will scoop it up, pack it into tractor trailers and truck it to a commercial landfill such as they have in King George, Amelia, Charles City and Cumberland Counties. Cost? \$34 per ton.

Outta sight, outta mind.



Landfill supervisor, Pat Woodard consults with Brandon Zaluski who works for the independent contractor operating the landfill. "We're working closely with the contractor on a day-to-day basis to make sure they do it the way it's supposed to be done," says Pat who has 12 years experience dealing with what we throw away.

Photo by Phil Audibert

the cabinet underneath your kitchen sink," he challenges, "there's probably 10 bottles underneath there of stuff you do not want in your drinking water... Well, guess what, we throw all of those containers away and have been for years and years and years." And what about that half gallon of paint you hid in a trash bag and pitched? Well, it's probably busted open by now and is seeping through the ground... a toxic soup headed for the water supply.

It just so happens that the Rapidan Service Authority operates a well and standpipe that serves the sheriff's department, animal shelter, airport and several homes along Route 20, just a few hundred feet from the landfill. "With an unlined facility (such as ours) that's always a cause for concern because as the leachate gets into the ground you wonder what it's doing to the

# Outta sight, outta mind



One of the county's garbage trucks disgorges trash while Joey Cash looks on in the bulldozer. Every day, the contractor who operates the landfill must cover the day's trash with six inches of dirt. Note the cardboard that is not being recycled.

Photo by Phil Audibert

## The story of waste, part II

Two weeks ago, we ran the first part of this series about waste...a story that followed waste water from your drain to the river. What follows is part two, from the kitchen trash can to the landfill.

It's a little after 4 p.m. and the infectious cheerful Kenneth "Weedy" Yount is driving one of those garbage trucks with the arms that lift the green boxes up and over the cab, dumping the contents into the back. After emptying all of the boxes at the collection site, he pushes some buttons, flips some switches and a hydraulic battering ram compresses the trash towards the front. Each dumpster holds eight cubic yards,

and this truck can hold 20 dumpster loads before it must return to the landfill to be emptied.

In this particular load nestles a typical white kitchen trash bag that you threw into a green box the day before. If you're a typical homeowner, the contents of this bag consist primarily of packaging and used empty containers.

"Weedy's" typical day starts at 4 a.m. He usually takes care of the schools in the western end of the county first and then works his way back east, stopping at collection centers that have dumpsters. Some have only rollbacks and are collected by another truck, but all told, there are eight convenience centers in the county: Barboursville, Montpelier,



Photo by Phil Audibert

The beginning of the journey from the dumpster to the landfill for a typical household trash bag.

Daily, an average of 3.1 pounds of trash is disposed for every man woman and child in Orange County.

Mountain Tract, Unionville, Lahore, Locust Grove, Lake of the Woods, and the landfill itself. All of these centers are open from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m., seven days a week. Some stay open later on certain days.

"Weedy" pulls in to the landfill, and weighs in at the scales. He heads up the artificial hill that is Orange County's version of Mount Trashmore, backs up to a waiting bulldozer and disgorges the contents of the truck. Your white trash bag tumbles out with many like it. By the end of the day, every day including Sundays, a bulldozer operator will smooch between 100 to 150 tons of this household trash and cover it with six inches of dirt.

If the packaging and containers in your trash are made out of paper and cardboard, then this waste will break down fairly quickly. If you put plastic in your trash bag, and we all do, (after all, the bag itself is plastic) it will take longer because it is no longer exposed to sunlight. If you have glass in your trash, it will remain unchanged, taking up valuable space in the landfill, forever. More on recycling later.

Because of school and commuter traffic, garbage truck drivers usually take a long break in the middle of the day; some even go home and take a nap. They resume their rounds at about 4:30 in the afternoon. On weekends they run all day, emptying all the collection centers twice. Yes, it is that busy.

**An elderly woman, a scavenger, suddenly popped up out of the green box at eye level to him... "scared us both to death," he shudders.**

got wind of all this trash blowing around and pretty soon mandates, some with and some without money, started trickling down to the localities.

Today the solid waste system in Orange County is working well. But back in the bad ol' days, it was a mess. Horror stories abound.

It's strange what we consider trash...litters of cats and dogs abandoned like used Kleenex, dead farm animals, like the calf Yount found in a green box on Rt. 692. How about the pig's head that "went plunk on top of the truck and slid down the windshield." That happened when current landfill supervisor Pat Woodard was a truck driver. Back in those days, she says, "You'd come in Monday morning and there would be stuff all over the ground. It took forever to clean up and there was stuff in there that there shouldn't be, batteries... people just slinging stuff every which-away."

How about the time a trash truck driver lifted the dumpster with the rusted bottom and a slab of concrete that a contractor



had thrown into this "household refuse only" bin dropped out? It slid through the windshield of the truck, almost crushing the driver. He escaped, but that could have killed him.

One of the strangest items left at a collection center was an inboard motor boat. And of course sofas, refrigerators, brush, construction debris, all stuff that we should have hauled ourselves to the landfill, was dumped at the collection sites before they were staffed, fenced and gated.

The biggest surprise Yount encountered happened when he was lifting a dumpster and an elderly woman, a scavenger, suddenly popped up out of the green box at eye level to him... "scared us both to death," he shudders.

Since the fences and gates were installed, most of these abuses have stopped. County administrator Bill Rolfe tells attendants that they are not law enforcement officers; if they encounter abuse, they are to take down license plate numbers. Let



**Above, left to right, it takes some experience to line a trash truck up with a dumpster so that the hydraulic arms slip into the sleeves. Dumpsters should only be used for household refuse. Before the collection sites were staffed, fenced and gated, trash truck drivers saw everything from sofas to brush, refrigerators to dead animals discarded in and around the green boxes. Hydraulic arms lift a dumpster to empty its contents into a trash truck at the Unionville collection site. At left, Kenneth "Weedy" Yount enjoys the freedom of his job driving a trash truck around Orange County. His busiest day of the year is the day after Christmas.**

Photos by Phil Audibert

the sheriff's department deal with it. Still, some illegal or out-of-county trash gets in. "But it's not the guy with the dump truck load of shingles from a surrounding county who wants to avoid a tipping fee there anymore," says Rolfe. And Pat Woodard still has faith that, "Most people want to do the right thing and if you have an outlet for them, they'll most likely use it."

Scavenging. One side of us applauds the effort to convert and reuse stuff; the other side is horrified. Since the fences and gates went up three years ago, scavenging has been reduced to almost nothing. In fact, Rolfe receives occasional complaints that the collection center attendants themselves are sifting through the refuse. "Quit going through the daggone trash," he admonishes. "There's no more dumpster diving, guys; it's dangerous."

Recycle instead. "We're doing better at it," says Pat Woodard... 1,933 tons of cardboard, aluminum, glass, plastic, and white metal last year. Not included in that figure was the disposal of 292 additional tons of toxics like batteries, tires, waste oil and antifreeze, which we paid somebody to haul away. Outta sight, outta mind.

"Sure, you've got some people who don't want to do it," admits Woodard of the recycling program, but since the state lowered its recycling goal from 25 percent to 15 percent, Orange County has been able to comply, recycling 17 percent of its household waste. The area of the county doing the most recycling is Lake of the Woods which contributes more recyclables than all the other collection sites combined.

Of course the biggie is white goods... kitchen appliances and the like. "We get a good price for the metal," continues Woodard. "We're actually getting a pretty good price for newspaper and cardboard now. That offsets plastic... plastics, you don't get anything for that hardly. As a matter of fact, some plastics we have to pay five cents a pound to get rid of it."

She looks at a report she filed with the Department of Environmental Quality. It seems after you subtract the recyclables and the industrial and construction waste, we threw out 17,009 tons of household trash last year. That's 3.1 pounds of trash for every man woman and child in Orange County every day...about a half ton each per year. Just this past June, the county decided to contract out the landfill operation, but Pat Woodard hastily adds, "Ultimately the county is still responsible." She says so far the new contractor is doing a bang-up job.

Lake of the Woods is also the busiest collection center in the county. Sometimes cars are lined up 25 deep... people waiting to drop off their refuse. "Sitting in line is not a convenience to me or any other citizen," grouses Rolfe. "We've reached our limit out there." Plans call for another collection center on the new middle school property at the intersection of Routes 20

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