

The junk stops here

Disposal companies are laughing all the way to the dump



KAZ NOVAK, THE HAMILTON SPECTATOR

Don Freeman has brought his Just Junk to Hamilton.

BY LISA GRACE MARR

Our obsession with stuff has given rise to a whole new industry.

Just this week, Don Freeman introduced the first franchise of Just Junk, a Niagara-based junk removal company, to Hamilton.

Freeman saw opportunity hidden in the garages which no longer have room for the car and the basements exploding with boxes, papers, old stoves and out-of-date chesterfields. He investigated Just Junk and acquired the franchise rights. He plans to expand the service into Burlington this year and Oakville and Mississauga next year.

Most junk removal companies are in expansion mode.

Mike Thorne started the parent company of Just Junk about four years ago in Niagara when his sister asked him to get rid of the debris from her house renovations.

"I was sitting in line at the landfill and there were 40 or 50 cars in front of me. I thought 'Why isn't there a business that does this?'"

Now the company has four trucks, 10 employees and a passion for recycling and reusing – they divert about 60 per cent of the stuff they collect to charities such as Goodwill or Habitat for Humanity or to metal or paper recyclers.

They do it for the environment (they also donate \$1 from every job toward the Niagara Peninsula Conservation Foundation) and for their revenue picture.

The less junk taken to the dump, the lower the tipping fee.

Thorne said business is booming and so is

the competition.

Ben Dunk of Wee Haul has been operating his junk removal business in Hamilton for about a year. He also runs a service in St. Catharines and Toronto. Dunk was in the business of renovating houses and found the disposal side of it so fascinating that he ended up in the business of junk removal. As for the new shop in town, he's not worried. There's enough junk for everyone.

"(Junk removal) is really growing. More cities are cutting back and people are having to be responsible for their own waste disposal," he said.

City cutbacks or limits to bulk pickup, an aging population not physically able to dispose of large items and increased time constraints for young families are other reasons behind the industry's rapid growth, said Thorne.

"The way we look at it, there are millions of products introduced every day into the marketplace. Products aren't manufactured like they used to be and it doesn't cost as much to replace them. It's easier to throw out a broken TV then get it repaired. We buy and buy and don't think about how we're going to get rid of all of it."

Michael Smith, who runs his own business, M.A.K.A. Junk Removal in Burlington, said competition is good for consumers who faced high prices before companies started springing up about three or four years ago. He said certified businesses such as his own or the multinational 1-800-GOT-JUNK are also helping to raise the image of the industry.

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