

Out with the old

'This is a great business. The customers are just, "Thank you, thank you, thank you."'

BY KATHY FLAXMAN

The thing is, the previous owner of the tiny Cabbagetown house made false teeth in a room on the second floor where he saw patients. When he moved, there were no actual teeth to be found, but as subsequent owner Gerry Mason recalls, there were piles and piles of garbage: tubs and tubes of unknown materials, heaps of unidentifiable stuff and mounds of what looked like every bit of paper generated in the years the dental technician and his family had lived there.

"The gentleman had lived there since he was a teenager. We just got a bin and heaved it in," Mr. Mason recalls.

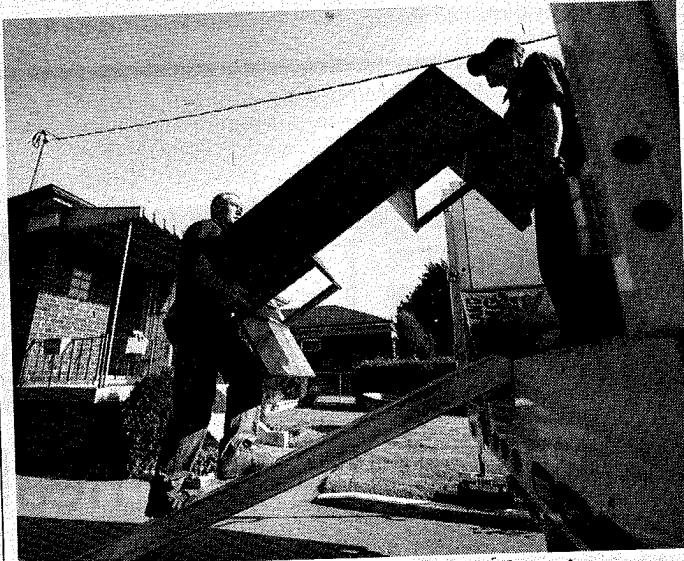
"Now I'm cleaning out the basement in my current home. This time, I'm putting out a bit every week with the garbage and recycling. It's a slow way to do it".

Junk is big business today. Homes go up for sale, people move, renovations take place, and sometimes families just want to get rid of the hoard of accumulated stuff in the basement. Or the attic. Or the garage. There's a lot to get rid of and lots of ways to make it disappear.

Real estate agent Karen Davis of Sutton Group Bayview Realty Inc. points out that to sell a home, it can't look cluttered, and she's an expert in sending the clutter to a better place.

"One way is to load up a vehicle or a trailer with all the junk and just take it to the dump," she says.

"There are a few locations for the city's transfer stations and they charge by weight, \$20 a ton. They weigh you and your vehicle going in and going out. If there is paint or anything toxic most city sites take that too (but it has to be separated out), so it's fairly simple. However, it is a stinky experience. A lot of people prefer a simpler solution. There are a few small guys with trucks who will do the job for you, and charge whatever they think is



Top, Tom Dickson of Just Junk packs his truck at a home in Scarborough. Above, he and Jason Monaghan load another piece of furniture. KEVIN VAN PAASSEN/THE GLOBE AND MAIL

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Tom Dickson of Just Junk

fair. That will be a bit more expensive."

And talk about one man's garbage being another man's treasure. Charities such as Goodwill or the Redwoods women's shelter are overjoyed to get their hands on furniture and other good stuff that needs a home. The Diabetes Association picks up clothing once a month, and for renovators with fixtures or construction materials such as sinks or flooring, there are stores operated by Habitat for Humanity, where the cool people shop for interesting doors and other second-hand goodies for their own renovations. You can get

a tax receipt and with enough warning, you can have your contribution picked up!

"We do pickups five days a week, and we take appliances, bathroom fixtures, windows - everything you use to build a house," Janice Love of Habitat says.

"People can advertise their stuff on craigslist, too," Ms. Davis says. "For free things, people will just come and take it away."

There are also larger companies who have made a profitable business of taking out the trash, like 1-800-GOTJUNK or Just Junk.

"We charge by volume," says Tom Dickson of Just Junk. "A full load is \$478, but we can take one small item like a couch for \$98. Anything we can, we recycle."

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For amateur decorators, getting rid of materials from their mistakes can be complicated because many of the removal companies are not licensed to

deal with toxic substances.

Then there are the companies that will tackle even the most extreme cleanups.

TraumaCare Cleaning Services, in Toronto, looks after clearing out a home if someone has moved to a nursing facility or, perhaps, died. They do human waste, pet waste, every type of situation possible, starting with going in and finding valuables and legal papers, often for executors of estates.

"We see all kinds of situations," Mike Maedel, owner of the company says. "We deal in homicides, suicides, decomposing bodies - you name it. When someone needs a place really emptied out, we might have to get rid of floor to ceiling waste and garbage."

"Sometimes people have lived in a place for a long time and they might be a hoarder. On the other hand, the homes we deal with are sometimes filled with valuable antiques which we'll sell through auction houses."

Professional builders and renovators also have tons of expertise when it comes to minimizing and getting rid of junk.

Michael DeJong of DeJong Homes points out that disposal is an important line in the budget for a new home or renovation. And all the trades are aware and active in taking care of it.

"Our drywall and roof materials are kept and recycled," he says. "We make use of places like Habitat for Humanity and take care that everything that can be recycled gets recycled. Sheet rock, aluminum and steel, wood - all is dealt with appropriately. Of course we use bins, maybe five or six, on an average job costing about \$400 each."

"Junk is big business. Companies collect old electrical wire and ship it in bins to China where the insulation is stripped off and the copper extracted and sent back here for use in electrical wire. It's good to see things being used."

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