

# The Standard

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## T. O. strike a boon for Just Junk

**Posted 3 hours ago**

Michael Thorne would like to see Toronto's garbage strike end and the black mark on the Big Smoke's international tourism reputation removed.

But until then, the St. Catharines founder of Just Junk will happily reap the rewards.

Business at his Garden Citybased trash removal company has skyrocketed since Toronto's city workers strike started nearly four weeks ago.

Calls for service for the company's three Toronto-area franchises jumped to about 200 daily, up from the usual 80.

Bookings online have grown exponentially.

The calls are coming from restaurants, apartment building managers looking to get rid of illegally dumped trash, and home dwellers with stacks of garbage bags piling up since the strike started June 22.

Many neighbourhoods are having "garbage parties," where residents get together to pool their trash and call Just Junk.

Removal prices in Toronto range from \$98 for one-eighth of a cube van to \$478 for a full load.

"I can tell you we're happy," said Thorne, the 31-year-old entrepreneur who started Just Junk in 2003.

"It's certainly helping us during this difficult (economic) time. For a lot of Toronto residents, it's not favourable for them. But a lot of different private businesses are certainly benefiting from it."

But Mark Ferguson, president of Toronto Civic Employees Union CUPE Local 416, isn't happy with any private company picking up trash.

"If they are picking up residential trash, we see that as being extremely problematic," said Ferguson, who represents striking Toronto garbage workers.

"It is strike breaking and those types of actions only lead to a protracted labour dispute rather than a quicker resolution if they were not to do the work."

Just Junk employees have encountered angry city workers at trash transfer stations who "perceive us as doing their jobs," Thorne said.

Workers have tried to use garbage transfer stations without picket lines to avoid confrontations, he said.

Thorne, a Sir Winston Churchill Secondary School graduate, said he isn't out to take sides in the strike, but to fill a need.

"For us it just makes good business sense. We have residents that have a need. There's garbage piling up."

So is the cash.

Just Junk, which is licensed by the Ministry of the Environment to pick up trash, has five franchises.

The monthly revenue from the company's three GTA operations has almost doubled since the strike began.

"Which is almost unheard of in service-based businesses," said Thorne, whose company's headquarters are at 1 St. Paul St.

To keep up, the company's six call-centre employees in St. Catharines have adopted a "all-hands- on-deck" approach, the Queen's University economics graduate said. Other franchises have loaned trucks and workers to the GTA operations to cope with the upswing in business.

Garbage bag and recycling duty is a switch for the company, which is normally called to pick up larger items, such as couches and stoves.

Thorne, who started the company in 2003, said he has no idea how long the strike will last, nor does he wish for it to go on forever.

He'd rather see the strike resolved and tourists return to Toronto.

"It's certainly great for business, but at the end of the day, there's always business to be had."

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