

# Local franchise hauls Just Junk in Etobicoke

## Do-it-all junk hauler skyrockets from 2003 startup to projections of \$1-million revenues this year

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Tom Dickson was a beleaguered auto industry marketer when a newspaper business story caught his attention one morning in March over breakfast.

The article profiled Just Junk, the successful St. Catharines-based removal company founded in 2003, and expected to collect \$1 million-plus in revenues this year.

Curious, Dickson sent an e-mail to learn more to company founder Mike Thorne. Thorne called. The two talked, and talked, and talked some more.

In August, Dickson became the owner of Just Junk's first Toronto-area franchise serving Etobicoke and the Toronto central west area after quitting the auto industry job he'd held for 15 years.

"I really didn't know these businesses were around," the 39-year-old entrepreneur said, in an interview, of reading the newspaper story that would change his life.

"We'd always had so much junk in our house, in the basement, in the garage. What are we going to do with all of it? There was always more and more."

Thorne had the same experience in 2003 when he

found it tough to find a firm to remove old office equipment from his employer Bell Canada in downtown Toronto.

The experience got Thorne to thinking about how everything in the world would one day need to be disposed of in an environmentally friendly way.

So Thorne moved back to his native St. Catharines, and placed a small classified ad. Calls poured in. Thorne, another worker, and their \$500 used van were in business.

Five years later, the firm is breaking into the potentially lucrative Toronto market.

"We're really excited about breaking into the Toronto junk removal market," Thorne, a 29-year-old Queen's University economics graduate, said in a statement.

### LOCAL OPPORTUNITY

Dickson and a colleague opened the Etobicoke and Toronto central east franchise in mid-August. Since, Dickson has been working in the field, driving the truck, learning the business.

Soon, he said, he'll hire another employee and start to oversee the operation and its marketing.

Junk removal isn't the exercise it once was for home and business owners. City curbside programs are reduced.

Waste transfer stations now charge tipping fees.

Dickson said Just Junk is an answer for environmentally conscious consumers looking for quick, easy removal of junk, for Baby Boomers wanting to downsize decades of living, and for families living with the remnants of home renovations that clutter their driveways.

### GREEN GARBAGE

Just Junk employees recycle wherever possible, Dickson said, noting reusable furniture and clothing is donated to the Etobicoke Goodwill store on Dundas Street West, and reusable building materials find their way to Habitat for Humanity.

Business is good. Some 70 per cent of clients has resulted from two 30,000-flyer mailouts to homes in Etobicoke in August and September. Dickson said he plans to repeat the mailings this month and next.

And he parks his new white truck, emblazoned with the Just Junk logo, at night in the parking lot of Honeydale Mall facing Dundas Street West for added exposure.

"Everybody is familiar with the bins," Dickson said of Just Junk's competitors.

"Our business is full-service. We've got a bin on



Guardian photo/ IAN KELSO

**GARBAGE GUY:** Tom Dickson has just started his Etobicoke franchise of a waste removal company called Just Junk.

wheels. We load it, and take it away. It's not an eyesore that sits in your driveway for 10 days."

Staff in green shirts and khaki pants pick up everything from furniture and appliances to yard waste and rubbish.

Removal prices range from \$108 for the equivalent of a pickup truck to \$468 for eight loads.

Franchisees like Dickson benefit from Just Junk's central customer service centre, national advertising, proprietary software for business analysis and support.

The company opened its first franchise

in the Hamilton, Burlington and Oakville corridor last year. It expects to operate a total of 100 franchises by 2012.

Since 2003, the company has hauled away junk for 15,000 customers. It plans to expand Just Junk across Canada and the U.S.

Just Junk operates corporate offices in St. Catharines and Tampa Bay, Fla.

Its first U.S. franchises recently sold in Tampa Bay and Jacksonville, Fla.

Wackiest junk? The firm has carted off an 800-pound bank vault door, 2,000 pounds of Jack Daniels whisky bottles, a half a sailboat and a McDonald's drive-thru sign.

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