



YOUR TOWN

It's only garbology

TEXT AND PHOTOS BY
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Some call it a transfer station because it transfers garbage from homes to a waste management company. Some call it the dump, and others refer to it as Mount Trashmore. But no matter what you call it, the transfer station is as important as the local barbershop or post office in many New England towns. It's a place to say hello to friends, get the latest news or gossip and, sometimes, meet a campaigning politician.

Frank Chaisson is a familiar face at the Grantham transfer station, also known as Mount Trashmore. He's been there since 2004, working five days a week with Ray Hamilton, a part-time employee, and supervisor Tony Wilson.

He arrives at 7:30 a.m. to make sure the shop is ready: Cans are sorted, recycle bins are dumped, the roll off truck is aired up and compactor box reading is within a normal range. There might be a bit of time for some general maintenance, such as yard clean up. All this prep work has to be done before the gate is opened;

you never know how heavy the traffic is going to be on any given day. "What happened yesterday will invariably not happen today," says Frank, a resident of Springfield.

Stick around one Saturday morning to watch the ebb and flow of traffic. A contractor is filling up the wood box with construction debris and a family of four is tossing bag after bag of garbage into the compactor while two cars wait their turn. In less than 20 minutes, the glass recycling container is full. In a four-hour period, more than 70 people may visit Mount Trashmore, half of them arriving the last hour before closing time.



The Grantham transfer station is orderly and neat.

supposed to go in there," says Frank. "It's like switching off a bomb." It could be needles or other toxic substances; he once caught a nurse tossing in a bag of bio-hazardous waste that should be disposed of at a hospital.

You never feel that you are being monitored when you visit the dump, because the guys are friendly, helpful and service oriented. But they play by the rules — if there is an infraction, the town is liable.

"We explain to people that you can't do that. Not because we said so, but because it is an ordinance voted on by the selectmen or a state or federal guideline," says Frank, who is certified Level 4 in Solid Waste Management by the state of New Hampshire. Residents don't always want to hear this, but many take

Frank and Ray are constantly on the go; they are employed in the fourth most dangerous occupation in the United States. And it's not just a matter of dodging the drivers who don't heed the traffic signs; it's the constant threat of hazardous waste and materials. "All it takes is something in the compactor that is not



Frank Chaisson and Ray Hamilton pause by the roll off truck.

it in stride. Those who don't may be banned from the station for 30 days, and have to go in front of the selectmen to get their dump privileges back.

The busiest section of the transfer station is the recycling station in front of the shop, a red building near the entrance. This is where families sort the aluminum cans from the tin cans, #2 from #1 plastic, white glass from colored glass and newspapers from corrugated cardboard. Don Barton, a longtime Grantham resident, keeps a close eye on the bins, sorting out the redeemables to a second container. "Don takes a lot of the load off us," says Frank. "Like Bayer aspirin, he works wonders."

The redeemables are extremely important — for the environment as well as for town revenue. Claremont resident Tony Wilson, who started at the station in November 2005 as a driver, notes that the team has increased recyclables by 28 percent. In May, the Grantham Transfer Station shipped out nine loads (90 tons) of mainstream waste. A year ago, the average was 120 tons. This is because many of Mount Trashmore's educational awareness programs take recyclable products — like plastic and cardboard — out of the compactor and into the appropriate bin.

"Twenty five percent of cardboard used to go into the mainstream. Now people pull it out, Frank and I pull it out," Tony says. "With a little bit of education and everyone working together, Grantham and Eastman are responsible for the growth in funds."

Tony also does his part by negotiating with vendors to get the best price; the mixed metal bin, for example, used to go to Windsor, Vt., and the town received \$80 per ton. Now it goes to Claremont to a member of the Northeast Regional Recovery Association and the town receives \$135 per ton. "We want to get the station as economically independent as possible, focusing on programs that reimburse the expenditures to operate the place," Tony says. "Although the number of tons coming through the gate have gone up, loads of mainstream rubbish have gone down."

In your rush to drop off your trash, be sure to say hello to the guys who work at the Grantham Transfer Station. They are family men with children and grandchildren; they are veterans; they have pets, hobbies and stories to tell. Just ask Frank, a retired career fireman, if he has mastered the Les Paul progression yet. (Frank is an avid blues guitarist.) Or ask if Ray, who works full time at the Grantham Village School in addition to his job at the transfer station, and his family (he has six children) are

enjoying their new Sutton home. Their days aren't always good ones, but they stay for the people.

"This job in a word? Dangerous. And hot, cold and wet. Seasons here are not kind to the body," says Frank. "There are tender moments though. People who come here and pass on, people who move south, people who thank me for my service. They give you a hug or shake your hand, because they have not forgotten that little act of kindness." **K**



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