

Longtime hauler feels threatened by plan

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ThisWeek Staff Writer

For many, trash is simply something people place at the curb each week. For others, it's a livelihood.

For the past several weeks, residents who live in Lincoln Village and use Cumberlander Refuse have been fighting to retain the services of a man they know and trust. Trustees decided last week to proceed with the drafting of a bid package to allow the township to offer an exclusive contract to a single trash hauler.

While Cumberlander Refuse could bid, the reality is it couldn't handle the more than 18,000 residents who make up Prairie Township.

Robert Cumberlander, owner of Cumberlander Refuse, said he currently has four employees and two trash trucks. He serves 1,100 residences, mainly in the Lincoln Village North and South areas.

"It's not fair when our customers are very pleased with us," Cumberlander said.

In recent weeks, residents who use Cumberlander have spoken to trustees at public meetings, praising the customer service Cumberlander provides.

Cumberlander is the second generation to run Cumberlander Refuse, he said. His father started the company in 1967 and had only had an open-bed truck to haul refuse away.

Cumberlander said his father treated his customers well and they in return offered not only their business but their friendship. It wasn't uncommon for his father to accept an offer of coffee and small talk while on his route, he said.

"My dad always made sure to give people good service," he said.



By David Rea/ThisWeek

Robert Cumberlander, owner of Cumberlander Refuse, currently serves 1,100 Prairie Township residences. The company has operated in the township since 1967, when Cumberlander's father started it. The township's plan to move to a single-trash-hauler system threatens the company's existence, according to Cumberlander.

Back in the late 1960s, one of the biggest competitors at that time was King Trucking. King Trucking, as well as many others, have disappeared while Cumberlander has remained, he said.

"My dad made a name for himself and got to know the residents," he said. "That was a way for him to compete."

Cumberlander said, "We're the only longest-running company in the area. We have very loyal customers and they have stuck with us through the years."

What is frustrating to Cumberlander, he said, is the fact that he has very little information on the bidding process.

"I don't even know how many residences there are," he said. "They haven't given me any information. It's really confusing."

If the township proceeds with an exclusive contract with a single trash hauler, Cumberlander said he's concerned about what may happen to his business.

"I would have to lay off people," he said. One of his employees has been with him for about 20 years.

Cumberlander said he is currently seeking legal advice to see if there is anything he can do to maintain what he has.

"Some of my customers are helping me to do all we can," he said.