

Time to clean it up and haul it away

For many, spring cleaning includes removing ratty couches, old mattresses or badly outdated appliances. Such tasks may seem to require enlisting the help of reluctant friends or hiring an expensive cleanup crew.

In fact, some junk-removal companies can make getting rid of unwieldy household goods a simple and relatively inexpensive process.

When It's Got to Go

One example is the national franchise 1-800-Got-Junk. The company removes almost anything, from old furniture and appliances to garden waste and renovation debris. Customers do not even have to bring the items to the curb. The haulers go into attics, basements, garages or wherever the waste happens to be — plus, they do all the loading and cleanup. The only category they do not take is hazardous materials.

Drew Trautman owns the chain's Springfield, New Jersey-based franchise. He joined the company in 2004 as a field-based operations support field advisor in Washington D.C. and opened the Springfield location in 2007. His franchise has over 30 trucks and serves Bergen, Passaic, Hudson, Essex, Morris and parts of Sussex County.

His usual jobs involve removing televisions, household appliances, furniture and wood. However, his workers also have removed:

- 18,000 cans of expired sardines
- a mechanical bull
- a 36,000-pound boiler
- 13 huge porcelain Buddha statues
- three truckloads of old newspapers and magazines.
- relics from World War I and II, such as defused bombs, a bazooka rocket launcher and machine guns.

Changing Trashy Image

Trautman never imagined that he would



PHOTO COURTESY OF 1-800-GOT-JUNK

The 1-800-Got-Junk uniformed team removes debris from a site under renovation. Clean, well-labeled trucks are part of the company's attempt to create a more professional image for the junk-removal business.

go into the "junk" business.

"Everybody remembers 'Sanford and Son,'" he said, referring to the 1970s sitcom about junk dealers in a rundown neighborhood in Los Angeles. "It was a very funny show, but it didn't make the junk removal business look very glamorous."

About ten years ago, through the online community Young Entrepreneur, Trautman met Brian Scudamore, founder and CEO of 1-800-Got-Junk. Trautman was sold on the business immediately.

"No one had done this professionally before, with new trucks, professional employees and a professional image," he said.

"It was clear that Brian was trying to dispel the myths and stereotypes of the junk business and it was obviously working for several reasons." For example, company employees drive new trucks that franchisees are required to wash every day and they wear uniforms that must be clean.

Customers simply phone a national call center (1-800-Got-Junk) or book a job through 1800gotjunk.com. The order moves to a database that determines which franchise gets the job. When arriving on site, the 1-800-Got-Junk team knows exactly where to go, what to remove and how the customer should be billed.

"We work with many customers who

WHERE DOES THE JUNK GO?

"We make every effort to recycle and/or donate the furniture, household items, scrap metal and other items we remove for our customers," Trautman said. "We have great relationships with local charities and recycling centers across the state."

Many times, the metal goes to a scrap recycling company, to conserve natural resources and reclaim valuable secondary materials for reuse into new products.

Park Stein, Inc., Clifton (parkstein-nj.com), has specialized in that type of work for more than 60 years. The company collects, processes and recycles both ferrous metals (iron and steel) and nonferrous metals (such as aluminum, copper, stainless steel, nickel, brass, tin, titanium and others). The material is shipped to steel mills and foundries around the world, where it is repurposed into new, finished steel and other metal products.

"We take great pride in the fact that we are able to manage scrap and help make sure that it's used to create new products," said Park Stein President Steve Tendler. "We believe our work makes the world a better place to live."

are moving, emptying their costly storage spaces, looking for an alternative to dumpster rentals, who need to dispose of excess scraps from home renovations or simply just want their space back," Trautman said. "I'm proud to be part of a company transforming an industry that was very beat-up."

— DOUG SCANCARELLA