

# Garbage piling up in some neighborhoods

BY JAMES SCOTT BARON  
THE FREE LANCE-STAR

Scores of Fredericksburg-area residents have turned to social media and local elected officials to vent their frustrations over hit-or-miss trash collection.

“Unless they start picking up when they are supposed to and their customer service improves, I will be contacting the Better Business Bureau,” one local resident wrote about GFL Environmental on an online community forum.

“GFL hit me with an inexplicable \$50 charge and I have no idea what it was for,” wrote another. “No idea when my pickup day is either.”

But it’s not just local residents who are concerned with GFL’s trash removal methods. The company—based



Trash bins sit at the end of driveways on Marlborough Point Road in Stafford County.

in Vaughan, Ontario, Canada—bills itself as the “fourth largest diversified environmental services company in North America.” But the company has a rating of a 1.1 (out of 5) on Google reviews, and it has a 1.03 rating on the Better Business Bureau’s national website.

GFL came on the Fredericksburg scene in 2021, when it acquired Waste Management and later County Waste, then Shifflett’s Waste Services. That left GFL, American Hauling Services and Davis Disposal as the three commercial trash companies permitted to dump residential

trash at the regional landfill on Eskimo Hill Road.

Most customers learned of GFL’s consolidation when they checked their mailbox last month. GFL sent postcards to customers announcing new pick-up days that would start near the end of June, but the announcement did little to calm the nerves of some area residents who wondered if their mounting piles of trash would ever be picked up.

Hank Thomassen, who lives on Indian Point Road in Stafford, said he accumulated so much trash he was forced to store the overflow in his garage. On July 11, he sent a letter to Rep. Abigail Spanberger and Sens. Mark Warner and Tim Kaine, calling the situation in his rural

SEE TRASH, A12

# TRASH

► FROM A1

neighborhood “a health disaster waiting to happen.”

“My community has now gone 10 days without trash removal, and I expect two weeks to pass before I receive my trash pick-up,” he wrote in the letter.

Gail Carlson, who serves as president of the Leeland Station homeowners association in southern Stafford, said some residents there haven’t had their trash collected in over two weeks. And she said the 800 homes in Leeland Station that were previously served by Shifflett’s for \$15.90 per home, now pay \$22.26.

“We’ve had the worst possible service,” Carlson said. “There’s a lot of military wives, stay-at-home moms, babies. Can you imagine the diaper smell?”

Officials in Spotsylvania County are getting their fair share of complaints from residents, too.

“A lot of calls,” said county spokeswoman Michelle McGinnis. “They’re calling us, they’re calling the county, they’re calling board members and complaining.”

Carlson said when Shifflett’s was purchased by GFL, the HOA contacted County Waste, only to find out it had also been purchased by GFL. With no other trash haulers willing to pick up residential waste at 800 homes, Carlson said the HOA felt rushed to enter into a contract with GFL to address the mounting trash in the neighborhood, despite a 40% rate hike over what was previously paid to Shifflett’s.

“We were kind of strong-armed into the contract,” Carlson said.



PHOTOS BY TRISTAN LOREI / THE FREE LANCE-STAR

**Hank Thomassen carries trash out of his garage in Stafford on Wednesday. After two weeks of no trash pickups, Thomassen’s garage was filled with trash.**

“This is a monopoly and this should have never been allowed to happen.”

A similar situation involving GFL’s customer service is unfolding just west of Springfield, Illinois, according to a report in the Journal–Courier.

On July 12, Jacksonville, Illinois, officials said they were fielding calls from “confused and frustrated” residents after GFL acquired a trash collection company in that region that served three counties. The previous year, GFL bought another trash hauler whose parent company provided waste disposal for Jacksonville, but the buyouts left GFL as the only option for residential and business trash collection in the city.

GFL’s consolidation of trash companies in the Fredericksburg region garnered the attention of Stafford resident Ben Litchfield, who wrote an editorial for The Free Lance–Star last month. In it, Litchfield said GFL’s con-



**Andy Pineau (left) and John Seay unload trash from the bed of their truck at the regional landfill.**

solidation of trash haulers in the region “highlights the need for more state funding to protect and preserve competition in the marketplace.”

“Arguably, GFL Environmental’s acquisition of both County Waste and Shifflett’s fits the description of a deal that substantially lessens competition,” Litchfield wrote.

GFL representatives did not respond to attempts

to learn when residents can expect improved trash removal service.

The Newnan (Georgia) Times–Herald reported that last week, GFL was put on 30-day notice by city officials who say GFL is in “breach of contract” for failure to provide weekly service to residents. Other allegations against GFL in Newnan include failure to provide monthly ton-

nage reports of collected garbage, failure to separate recyclables and report recyclable financials to the city, failure to maintain reliable equipment, failure to provide staff to operate equipment, failure to file required reports and failure to follow a schedule that provides a timely trash collection service.

To help Stafford and Fredericksburg residents remove accumulated trash, the Eskimo Hill Road landfill has instituted a gate fee waiver for GFL customers in those two locations that runs through next weekend. For now, other regional landfills have not made similar provisions.

Stafford’s R-Board Director Phil Hathcock said the landfill has received numerous calls from residents with accumulating trash at their homes who say the refuse is starting to attract insects and rodents.

“The waiver is designed to prevent that, help the environment and protect human health,” Hathcock said. “Our motivation to do this was to give the citizens some relief.”

Hathcock said Fredericksburg and Stafford residents who bring a paper GFL invoice or trash containers bearing the Shifflett’s, County Waste or GFL logos, will be permitted to drop household trash at the landfill free of charge until Sunday.

“My goal is to help the residents as best I can,” Hathcock said.

But Hathcock said the entry waiver at Eskimo Hill is not a free pass for residents to dispose of broken refrigerators, furniture, mattresses or other large household products.

“It’s for the things GFL wouldn’t pick up on your curbside,” Hathcock said.

James Scott Baron: 540/374-5438  
jbaron@freelancestar.com

# Stafford facility goes ‘last mile’ for Amazon

BY JAMES SCOTT BARON  
THE FREE LANCE-STAR

Like busy sailors on the flight deck of an aircraft carrier, workers at Amazon’s Stafford County delivery center wear different colored safety vests to identify their roles in moving more than 45,000 packages every day for delivery to doorsteps throughout the Fredericksburg region.

“It almost reminds me of the military,” retired Marine Edward Buggs said. “It’s a lot of moving

parts, but with everybody working collectively, everything comes together.”

Buggs, who lives in Stafford and served in the Marine Corps for 22 years as a logistics and transportation specialist, said although he’s only worked for the e-commerce giant just over three months and wears a green vest today, his sights are set on a red one.

“I watched this place slowly being built and as soon as it opened up for

**SEE AMAZON, A12**



The Stafford distribution center opened in October. Amazon plans a much larger facility there next year.

me to apply here, I jumped on it,” Buggs said.

Buggs’ green-trimmed safety vest tells other associates on the floor he’s a safety observer, while those wearing red manage the sprawling 200,000-square-foot delivery station along Centreport Parkway. Other vests on the floor trimmed in orange, blue and purple indicate other roles people fill within the facility, where Buggs feels he’s found a future.

“I’m glad to be here, most definitely,” Buggs said.

The delivery center opened in October and employs about 280 people who sort and move thousands of packages in what Amazon associates call a “last-mile facility” that serves customers throughout the Fredericksburg region, from Woodbridge to Doswell.

“Delivery stations are the last mile of Amazon’s order process and help speed up deliveries for our customers,” said Emily Hawkins, the regional communications lead.

Hawkins said there are 300 similar Amazon last-mile facilities across the U.S., with 20 of them in Virginia.

“It is one of the higher-volume states,” Hawkins said. “There’s customer demand here.”

During the new facility’s first Christmas holiday season, the distribution center processed more than 60,000 packages a day.

In addition to the associates’ color-coded vests, the floor of the large facility, as well as some permanent structures and equipment within it, are also color-coded to improve efficiency and ensure worker safety. Managers say safety is the No. 1 priority.

“You can’t have a safe building if it’s not clean,” Operations Manager Dylan Childers said. “When you see clutter, that’s when accidents are happening.”

The workday for Amazon’s Stafford associates begins early as a steady stream of mostly Richmond-based trucks arrive at the inbound docks, where the process of manually sorting packages for delivery begins.

Phil McClellan, who serves alongside Childers as operations manager at the facility, said sorting the packages and loading them onto delivery vans is about a 10-hour process.

“This kicks off at 1:20 [a.m.] and we normally have about 25 percent of our volume that’s all lined up, ready to go,” McClellan said. “We have trucks



PHOTOS BY TRISTAN LORE / THE FREE LANCE-STAR

## Pendulum Delivery owner Bob Thomas tracks his drivers from the Amazon facility in Stafford. His company helps Amazon deliver packages in the area.

that continue to come in throughout the shift. They come in with metal cages called go-karts.”

McClellan said packages are placed on a moving belt system that routes them to a sea of sorting lanes called delivery clusters, where workers remove the packages by hand and place them into bags that are stacked in predetermined delivery order into carts.

Those carts eventually make their way to a covered “launch pad” that resembles a boarding area at a municipal airport. Delivery vans are strategically positioned in tight groups for loading, but drivers cannot depart the launch pad on their own. They are released simultaneously in a carefully orchestrated effort.

“Everyone will be released at once, and none of the vans leave until everyone is back inside their vans ready to go and everyone’s off the launch pad,” Childers said.

Childers said even the routes the drivers navigate throughout the workday are predetermined, taking into consideration such factors as an individual cargo van’s capacity, traffic on roadway conditions and travel times.

“A lot of it is based on historical data,” Childers said. “It’s very accurate.”

He said when online shoppers order a product from Amazon and receive a delivery date on their computer or phone, the e-commerce software responsible for facilitating the delivery has already calculated all factors with extreme accuracy.

McClellan said the Amazon system identifies the desired product, then calculates where that product will be sourced from, the boxing or packaging time and the stops the package has to make along the way before it arrives at the customer’s front door.

Assisting in the delivery effort at the Stafford dis-



## After packages are delivered to the Amazon distribution center in Stafford, they are sorted into rows before being placed onto carts. The 280 workers handle more than 45,000 packages a day.

tribution center are 10 delivery service partners— independent businesses that hold contracts with Amazon to deliver packages in the area. Although private contractors, their delivery vans are branded with the Amazon logo.

Bob Thomas, owner of Pendulum Delivery of Fredericksburg, is one of those delivery service partners and said his fleet of 35 vans and more than 70 drivers primarily covers the Manassas and Woodbridge zone. Thomas, who has been in the regional operations and logistics industry his entire career, said Amazon has given him “tremendous opportunities” to succeed.

“It’s a very impressive facility and that’s what brought me here,” Thomas said. “Amazon is the best in the e-commerce industry, hands down.”

Thomas said he took his knowledge and experience from the operations and logistics industry and formed his own delivery service business to work out of the Stafford facility when it opened in October.

“With this [facility] being here and being able to leverage the Amazon logistics system, this was just too good of an oppor-

tunity, as it turned out,” Thomas said.

Childers said the delivery station is always hiring.

“If you have the drive, the work ethic, there’s nowhere to go but up,” Hawkins said.

Stephan Gordon, a King George County resident, has worked nearly one year with the company and said his wife works for Amazon in Manassas. Gordon came to the Stafford facility three months ago and now serves as an interim learning coordinator, which involves training, mentoring and coaching new associates.

“I’m the first person they see,” Gordon said. “I like it here and I’m not just saying that. ... I like this site, I like the managers here.”

Next year, Amazon plans to open a 630,000-square-foot cross-dock fulfillment center on Centreport Parkway in Stafford. Hawkins said the mammoth center will receive pallets of inventory to be sorted and routed to Amazon fulfillment centers across the country, including those in Chester, Clear Brook, Petersburg, Sterling and Richmond.

James Scott Baron: 540/374-5438  
jbaron@freelancestar.com

# Eatery owners still 'living the dream'

BY JAMES SCOTT BARON  
THE FREE LANCE-STAR

If you haven't stepped into Fredericksburg's Parthenon restaurant for a number of years, you'll be surprised to find it still looks, smells and feels the same as it did in the mid-1980s. In fact, you'll still see owner Manny Psaras working in the kitchen while his wife Sophia tends to the tables and customers.

"The only thing that's changed is I got them to close on Monday," said Irene Psaras, the couple's daughter who helps out on weekends and whenever she can get away from her own business next door at Renee's Crepes and Cakes.

"It looks pretty much like it looked in the '80s," she said. "The kitchen is essentially the same."

Irene said many things inside her parents' small Greek and Italian restaurant haven't changed much since March 1984, when the couple began serving homemade pizzas, pastas, gyros and baklava.

"Ninety-five percent of the stuff is still the same, other than the tablecloths and the booths," she said. "Even the freezers and refrigerators are 50 years old. Everything's still working."



Patrons will still find Manny Psaras working in the kitchen and his wife serving food in the longtime Fredericksburg eatery.



The couple has operated the Parthenon since March 1984.

Originally from the Greek island of Karpathos, which lies in the Mediterranean Sea between Rhodes and Crete, Manny and Sophia Psaras immigrated to Arlington in the mid-1970s separately to join relatives from each of their respective families who had already made the journey.

While in Greece, Manny worked as a laborer on construction jobs, pouring concrete for new homes. When he arrived in

SEE PARTHENON, A10

# PARTHENON

► FROM A1

the U.S., his first job was as a busboy in a Northern Virginia restaurant. Unbeknownst to Manny, his future wife Sophia, who was also living in Arlington's Greek community at the time, was a coat checker at another business in the area.

Irene said her father had a challenge speaking to others back then.

"He didn't even know one word of English," she said. "His best friend told him, whatever they say to you, you just repeat it."

Manny eventually met Sophia in 1976 during a community event. Although just a couple of years older than Manny, Sophia said the two actually lived in the same small village while growing up on Karpathos and even attended the same school, but after they met on U.S. soil for the first time in years, she said she was a bit surprised at Manny's reaction.

"He didn't even recognize me," Sophia said. "He said, 'Who's the young lady?'"

The couple fell in love and married the same year, and eight years went by until they decided to start their own business together.

The couple found three Northern Virginia restaurants for sale, including Fredericksburg's Parthenon at 2024 Augustine Ave., which was originally owned by two brothers who sold it to another man. That man sold it to Manny and Sophia one year after he ventured into the business. For the first six months of ownership, the couple drove from Arlington to Fredericksburg seven days a week before moving into an apartment close to the business, where the new menu featured homemade meals with a Mediterranean flavor.

"(Manny) grew up making bread," Irene said. "I think that's where the trick is. Everything is home made."

Although they didn't know anyone in Fredericksburg when they first opened the restaurant,

Sophia ventured out to deliver copies of the restaurant's menu to local businesses and medical offices in the vicinity. The late Franklin Powell, who was running Powell's Furniture—also on Augustine Avenue at the time—even pitched in to help the couple by spending over \$300 to buy an advertisement in The Free Lance—Star announcing the new establishment. For their first year in business, Manny even stepped away from the oven to deliver pizzas to students in dorms at the University of Mary Washington.

"After we got more busy, we stopped doing that," Manny said.

Irene, 41, said she grew up at the Parthenon, calling it "our first home."

"They work hard," Irene said. "They're like robots."

Now in their 70s, Irene said her parents' dedication to serving the community a good meal hasn't slowed down one bit since they first opened. She said her brother, a part-time dishwasher and herself are the only help the couple has to give them a hand.

"Unless I leave for Europe, I don't have a weekend off," Psaras said. "I think if they stop working they slow down more, but with them working there, it keeps them active."

Over the last 38 years in Fredericksburg, Manny and Sophia have developed a loyal following of customers who patronize the old-school restaurant.

Stafford County Commonwealth's Attorney Eric Olsen has been a devoted Parthenon customer since it first opened.

"Manny makes the best

pizza in town," Olsen said. "He has perfected pizza."

Olsen said the reason he keeps returning to the Parthenon is not only because of the great food and the "small-town restaurant feel," but because of the warm hospitality always extended by Manny and Sophia each time he walks through the door.

"They're so engaging. They're so friendly," Olsen said. "You feel like you're a member of the family when you come, and that's just the way it's always felt."

Barbara McQuiddy of southern Stafford has been dining at the Parthenon every Friday since the late 1970s, even before the Psaras' took over, back when the two original owners were operating the restaurant.

"Everybody is so nice there and the food is always so good," McQuiddy said. "For us to be going all these years, the food has to be good."

A few days after the January blizzard that dumped a heavy blanket of snow across the region, Manny came down with COVID-19 and was forced to stay away from the business for several weeks. Today, he has a clean bill of health and he's once again doing what he loves with his wife at his side. Irene said the idea of her parents ever retiring or closing the Parthenon is a topic the family doesn't venture into.

"I don't even bring it up," Irene said. "They're living the dream. I'll just let them enjoy what they have."

James Scott Baron: 540/374-5438  
jbaron@freelancestar.com



Manny Psaras, who grew up making bread, has been cooking for Fredericksburg patrons since 1984.