

Chickamauga goes to automated trash pickup

Saturday, February 7, 2009 by: [Mike O'Neal](#) ([Contact](#))



CHICKAMAUGA, GA — This Civil War city will become a boom town in March — on garbage day, at least.

New, bright blue garbage carts will be distributed and serviced by a truck equipped with an automated hydraulic boom arm.

“Our new truck is coming off the assembly line today,” Chickamauga City Manager John Culpepper said Friday afternoon. “This is a big step to make us more efficient, more cost-effective and will be a safer operation.”

Automated trucks — like those used in LaFayette, Ringgold and Chattanooga — save taxpayer money and are safer, said LaFayette City Manager Johnnie Arnold.

“The major advantages are savings in labor costs, it eliminates having two men on the back of the truck, and lowered workers’ compensation insurance costs,” Mr. Arnold said.



Staff photo by Mike O'Neal
A City of LaFayette public works employee uses an automated garbage truck equipped with a hydraulic boom. A similar truck will be placed in service by the City of Chickamauga in March.

LaFayette was losing about \$130,000 a year on the garbage service before the shift to automated pickup four years ago, he said. Since then, the city has broken even on its solid waste collection and has not raised its garbage fees.

Mr. Arnold said the new trucks cost about 35 percent to 40 percent more than conventional haulers.

“That is about a year’s salary for the two workers who are no longer needed,” he said. “In a little over a year the trucks pay for themselves. After that it’s saving money.”

Fuel costs are lower, too, because the new 95-gallon garbage carts — nearly three times the size of a standard garbage can — allow once a week pickup, instead of the current twice a week schedule, Mr. Culpepper said.

Chickamauga is using special purpose sales tax funds to buy a \$150,000 truck and to retrofit a conventional truck to serve as backup, said Jim Powell, the city office manager and zoning administrator. The city also is using SPLOST money to buy about 2,100 trash carts — some of 95 gallon capacity and some that are 65 gallon, he said.

Not having two men hanging off the back of a moving city vehicle is a cost saving in more ways than one, Mr. Culpepper said.

The highest insurance rate municipalities pay is not for firefighters or police, it’s for public works employees on the garbage detail. Cuts, sprains and exposure to traffic or even hazardous waste are threats.

“The most dangerous job we have is for those two men riding on the back of a garbage truck,” Mr. Culpepper said. “A prime example of that is, a man had his foot cut off when a lady ran into the back of a garbage truck in 1984.”

Mr. Powell, ever the fan of Gordon Lee High School’s Trojans, said the only drawback to the new system is the cart color.

“It is a little off — too light — to be Trojan blue,” he said.