

Back to nature

Spademan disposes of business

By BRUCE STAPLEY

Sorry folks, but Ralph Spademan is no longer at your disposal.

The gruff-mannered, hard-working former ice delivery man has sold his business, Spademan's Waste Disposal, west of Hwy. 47, north of the Stouffville Sales Barn.

But one thing's certain. We haven't seen the last of Ralph Spademan, not by a long shot.

"I'm not going to sit down and vegetate, I've still a few ideas left," he states with certainty.

These ideas include farming 20 acres of Christmas trees on his property near Utica, and the promotion of his pet cause, recycling. He also hopes to find time to do a little travelling.

The business sale in itself tells a great deal about what makes this unique individual tick. The purchaser was Miller Paving, but not because the Markham firm was the highest bidder.

Mr. Spademan, a fierce nationalist, was determined the company wouldn't fall into American hands.

"I regretted the Canadian firm couldn't come up with the same money as the American company," he says, "but I couldn't let it go American."

A big part of his opposition to an American takeover was the protection of his employees. "I didn't think it would be fair to them," he said. Spademan, who worked alongside his employees driving the disposal trucks until three years ago, developed a great respect for the people who worked for him. And he says they came to appreciate it.

"The employees worked for Ralph, they didn't work for Friday night," he insists.

Many of his 34 full-time staff had been there up to 20 years when he sold the business in December. "I always got involved," he says. "I worked alongside them. They knew that if they



So long Spademan

Ralph Spademan (inset) has sold his waste disposal business to Miller Paving in Markham. The Utica-area man says he'll now focus some of his spare

time on recycling ideas, predicting that by the turn of the century, there will be no garbage.

—Jim Thomas

didn't do it, I would. I always started first and finished last."

Ralph Spademan has never known anything other than hard work. Born in 1925, his father moved the family to Markham in 1930 to start a market garden operation after he lost everything as a machinist in the stock market crash of '29. He remembers helping his father in the fields as a kid, handling the horse-drawn cultivator.

When he was 11, his father began an ice delivery operation. He and his dad cut ice from Milne's Pond, Markham, and delivered it to customers by horse and democrat. The business became his responsibility when, at age 16,

"everyone went to war."

With the give and take of progress, he lost the icebox servicing business to electric refrigerators, but gained a new livelihood—collecting garbage.

Ralph went out and purchased an old three-quarter ton International truck. He then began lining up patrons.

"I'd do anything to get customers," he says. "I'd follow moving vans, and help people move in, just to get to pick up their garbage for 25 cents a week."

"I threw the garbage on and shovelled it off," he laughs.

As a sideline, he would repair broken sidewalks. In this regard, he can't forget the time Alma

Walker, then the reeve of Markham, got her heel stuck in one of his repair jobs on her way out of the post office. "She fired me on the spot," he says with a loud laugh. "But I was reinstated. Mind you, some of those pot holes I filled are still holding up."

By the time 1965 rolled around, Ralph Spademan could brag an impressive lineup of equipment, including side-loading garbage trucks, front-end loaders and roll-offs. It was in that year that he moved the operation to Stouffville, where he would line up contracts such as the one that saw him responsible for collecting all residential garbage in town. Other contracts were arranged

with the Scarborough Board of Education, the Town of East Gwillimbury and the York Region Board of Education.

When he sold the business, he had 2,000 customers, which he serviced with as many detachable roll-off containers and 20 trucks.

Ralph Spademan agrees garbage has been good to him in more ways than one. "It's always been hard work," he insists, "but still a lot of fun."

He claims some of his proudest possessions have been obtained from other people's waste. "I remember a lady who just wanted to clear everything out when her family broke up," he says. "We ended up hauling away a truck load of linens. I'm still using them."

"You can obtain anything you want from garbage," he claims. "We actually put in orders for things we needed. We obtained them eventually."

Ralph Spademan becomes serious when the subject of recycling is raised. "At the turn of the century, there'll be no garbage," he maintains. "No one will have it."

He insists products will have to be sold in returnable, or recyclable containers. "Mrs. Housewife has been trained to spend over half her grocery money on packaging. This has to stop. We've run out of places to put garbage."

Ralph personally composts his trash and refuses to buy anything in a can. "We received an electric can-opener for Christmas," he says, "it's never been used."

Ralph says he has ideas he'll promote in an effort to make recycling more popular. His own garbage, he claims, consists of one grocery bag-full every two weeks.

At age 62, Ralph Spademan intends to make his mark for years to come. While he's not at our disposal, the man and the company he created live on.

Have your say:

Question

Are you disappointed the academic program will not be extended past Grade 10 this fall?



DEBORAH DUTCHER

"I'll miss all the people I've come to know here, but I'm looking forward to attending a larger school."



ROB LOWE

"The teachers and my friends here have helped me a lot. I'll be sorry to lose those close relationships. I really enjoy this school."



MARC LAPOINTE

"Yes, I'm disappointed. All of my friends are here. I'll be going to a school where I'll hardly know anyone. It's difficult breaking up friendships you've made over the years."



BEAU PAQUIN

"This is a good school. My marks have improved because the teachers pushed me."