

Moving to a New Level

One of the benefits of editing *MSW Management* is that I have a priceless seat from which to view the variety of solutions that continue to evolve in response to a ceaselessly changing set of challenges and requirements. Mostly, this constant ebb and flow is a humbling experience, keeping me ever aware of the colossal gaps in my knowledge of how the pieces of the waste management puzzle fit together, and what to expect for tomorrow. But during the past several weeks I have become convinced that the industry is off and running with energy and a new sense of purpose after a period of indecision in what many (for lack of a better milestone) have labeled the post-Carbone era.

Most of the time my early warning sensors are tuned pick up *what's* happening since that's generally where the bucks are heading and, therefore, where the action is at. But in this case, my divining rod was set off by an assortment of *hows* and *whys*...admittedly a riskier method for picking up and/or analyzing substantive trends. Two new projects at opposite ends of the country--the 1,200 tpd Del Norte Regional Recycling Center in Oxnard (Ventura County), CA, and the Crisp County Solid Waste Authority in Cordele, GA--embody characteristics I find both interesting and significant.

Both are top-of-the-line, multi-line processing facilities established by public-private partnerships, and though there is nothing new or earth-shattering to the solid waste industry in any of these, its the *how* element that is significant. What makes these particularly interesting to me is that both seem to have a special understanding of the teamwork principle to which I subscribe most heartily. "It's like a marriage," suggested Dan Rosenthal of Los Angeles-based BLT Enterprises Inc., the private-sector participant. With a sweeping gesture to include Ruben Mesa, his public-sector counterpart with the city of Oxnard, he explained, "As in most marriages, we come to the altar with very different needs and expectations...only here we don't have the benefit of romantic love to fall back on when times are tough." Instead, both have come separately to the conclusion that for the partnership to endure, each partner must active work for the success of the other. It is what fighter pilots call "mutual support," the basis for all tactical doctrine in which each element is responsible for its counterpart's safety. Rather than trying to "protect my own six," I concentrate on keeping my wingman's tail clear while he does the same for me. In this case, Mesa sees to it that collection and delivery activities increase BLT's opportunity for profit, while Rosenthal sees to it the Oxnard City Council is satisfied with the performance of the operation.

The *why* element--particularly as exemplified in Crisp County's project--indicates to me a shift in management philosophy with tremendous implications for the future. While waste diversion and landfill space certainly provided the incentive for (and remain important elements of) what has burgeoned into a multi-community regional waste management operation in South-Central Georgia, the issue most responsible for bringing the participants to the table cementing the deal was water...specifically the safety and integrity of the aquifer upon which the area's principally agricultural economy depends. Had the issue been limited to how waste was to be managed by one community or another, it is doubtful (at least to this observer) that the project--a 25-year, put-or-pay agreement involving more than 30 communities--would have come together, no matter how attractively it was presented. And while I'm sure that all its participants will take pride in the fact that more than half the wastestream will be converted one way or another to beneficial use, the real satisfaction comes from the belief that they have taken an important step to preserve and protect a crucial and tangible resource. This can be a good lesson for all of us in keeping straight what's important.

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2020. At 22, the Del Norte Regional Recycling Center is forging ahead, looking to add the most modern conversion technologies available. Sadly Crisp County's project wend todn in flames.