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THE COURIER

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Editorials/Letters

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FILE

Casella's missed truths

By GEORGE MANUPELLI

In a recent guest column, John Casella, the owner of NCES and the CEO of Casella Waste Systems, said that a Courier editorial in May "missed the true lesson of the Craffey case." The true lesson, according to you, Mr. Casella, is that Mountain View owner Kevin Craffey is not only responsible for what he did when he illegally handled asbestos during renovations, he is also responsible for what you did when, according to the attorney general's office, you illegally allowed asbestos through the gate of NCES, accepted payment for it, and then dumped it in Bethlehem.

Blaming a customer may be the legal defense you've been advised to mount in case you are indicted by the state or sued by employees and Bethlehem residents, but it has nothing to do with the "true lesson" of what the Courier editorial actually said. It said simply that you, Mr. Casella, are unable (I would say unwilling) to monitor what goes into the landfill. It said that DES should admit its "original mistake of allowing a huge commercial landfill on this site (along the Ammonoosuc River) in the first place and withdraw its approval for expansion." I repeat: "Withdraw its approval for expansion."

So, to paraphrase the late President Reagan, the Courier's lesson, the one you chose to miss, Mr. Casella, is clearly "Mr. Casella and DES: Shut down this landfill!"

Instead of heeding the "asbestos lesson" or dealing with the facts of the issue, you rely instead on propaganda, Mr. Casella.

You say with great piety that you believe "compliance with laws designed to protect human health and the environment is not only good citizenship but good business as well." Do you mean your dysfunctional incinerator, Mr. Casella; your VOCs in test wells; your corporate compliance executive who lied about complying with his own license requirements and, given a second chance, lied again? Do you mean leachate between the liners; landfill gas with inflammable methane drifting offsite; 40-foot flames from your incinerator; sludge used as cover material, Mr. Casella? Do you mean paying a team of lobbyists in Concord a small fortune to persuade legislators to dis-

T-shirts should read, "Casella made \$100 million and all we got was a lousy gazebo."

mantle or gut those protections you claim to abide by? And do you mean ordering your battalions of lawyers to sue us repeatedly, hoping we'll cave in, not enforce our laws, and wait gratefully as you dangle promises of sucker money but don't pay what you already promised?

Do you mean to imply, Mr. Casella, that you are a poster boy for the Sierra Club because you capped Bethlehem's old municipal landfill (for which you were paid), and because you dug up the original Sanco landfill at Trudeau Road (which you ignored until the DES finally agreed to let you use that four acres to enlarge the landfill's footprint)? And do you mean, Mr. Casella, that even when it was legal to landfill asbestos you did not because you were such a tree-hugger - or was it because, as your then site engineer himself told me, it was not economically fea-

sible? That's not putting your money where your mouth is, as you claim. More like your foot.

You say "there are some for whom shutting down the landfill is such an all-consuming cause that they can't bring themselves to think about" the positive contributions of your company. Do you mean, Mr. Casella, positive contributions like not paying your fair share of taxes (about \$350,000 a year)? Like not honoring the original agreement with Bethlehem for a discounted tipping fee (instead of now charging us \$80 a ton versus the \$55 you charge our neighbors)? Like not honoring even the token 50 cents a ton host fee you agreed to (which would have given us more than \$90,000 a year)? We should wear T-shirts that say: "Casella made \$100 million and all we got was a lousy gazebo."

And when you say there are only "some" in town who believe 51 acres is enough, by "some" do you mean the hundreds who voted to approve warrant articles against expansion and against negotiations? Do you mean the nearly 500 residents who said in the survey for Bethlehem's master plan that their biggest concern was the landfill?

Where The Courier writes about the danger of hazardous substances like "solvents, old motor oil, lead paint, pesticides, medical waste, or asbestos" arriving undetected in garbage bags and leaking into the groundwater, you respond with the mother of all non-sequiturs, that "Asbestos is not water-soluble," as if we all just fell off the turnip truck.

But your parting shot that "The only proper way to dispose of asbestos is to bury it in a landfill," tells us more than you probably wanted us to know.

George Manupelli is a past president of AWARE: A Citizens' Committee for Bethlehem's Future.