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Recycling Up, Garbage Collections Down

Ten months after the Village Board proclaimed 2004 to be the *Year of the Environment* and launched a new pay-for-use refuse hauling rate structure, Oak Parkers have proven their commitment to keeping the community beautiful by increasing recycling 17 percent and reducing garbage by 5 percent.

“Oak Park has always been a leader when it comes to concern for the environment,” said Karen Rozmus, who in her role as Solid Waste Coordinator manages the Village’s recycling and garbage collection programs.

“Recycling takes more individual effort than just tossing everything in the garbage. But Oak Parkers understand that recycling is worth the extra effort when you consider the long-term benefits to the environment.”

Since the Village replaced the blue recycling bins with 64-gallon carts in February, an average of 15 more tons of recycling is collected every week. At the same time garbage collections are down by 25 tons each week.

The larger recycling carts were part of an initiative to allow residents to pay a reduced refuse hauling rate by downsizing their garbage carts from 96 gallons to 64 gallons. The 4,000 households that took advantage of the smaller carts pay \$13.30 per month, compared to \$15.80 per month for the larger carts.

Property owners who toss less and recycle more pay lower fees because they are helping to reduce costs associated with landfills, which are among the most costly factors in municipal refuse hauling programs, Rozmus explained.

“As landfill space continues to shrink, disposal costs will naturally increase as companies must pay more and travel further to the sites,” she said. “By encouraging property owners to reduce their garbage through more aggressive recycling, the Village hopes to keep costs associated with refuse hauling services as low as possible.”

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The larger recycling carts also enable residents to take full advantage of the latest *single-stream* collection approach that eliminates the need to separate recyclables. Single-stream programs allow all recyclable materials – whether paper, glass, plastic, aluminum or most metal containers – to be tossed into the same collection vessel, with separation occurring at the recycling sorting center.

Oak Parkers are doing more than embracing larger recycling containers and smaller garbage carts. Residents also have demonstrated their concern for the environment by participating in a range of special disposal and recycling events hosted by the Village, the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency and other area environmental and municipal organizations.

The Village's biannual *Great Paint Exchange*, which allows residents to get rid of unwanted, but usable paint by giving it to other residents, has become increasingly popular. Of the 432 cans of paint turned in to the Public Works Service at the September exchange, only 54 were not claimed by other residents, making this exchange the most successful one ever.

The Village also has hosted programs to allow residents to exchange their old gasoline-powered lawnmowers for vouchers to help pay for more environmentally friendly push and electric mowers.

In November, the Village will host a collection event where individuals can safely recycle their old computers, printers, monitors and related items free of charge. The event is funded by a \$10,000 grant from computer manufacturer Dell, Inc. Oak Park was the only Illinois community to earn a grant through the Dell program. The last electronics recycling event held here was in 2001 and collected 35,562 tons of electronics from residents of 26 communities.

The Village also has brought recycling to the community's special events and festivals by providing reusable containers so that cans and bottles are no longer be tossed in with the garbage.

For more information on the Village's recycling and waste collection programs, call 708.358.5700, email publicworks@oak-park.us or visit www.oak-park.us.

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