

September 11th Debris

By

Bob Messinger

September 11th was tragic in many ways. Lives were lost, many suffered injury, part of New York's skyline was changed, and an architectural and engineering marvel was destroyed. Sometimes forgotten, it also produced 1.5 to 2 million tons of debris that had to be safely disposed of.

While the goal was to move the debris out of the area as quickly as possible, the project might also be termed as one of the largest recycling efforts in history. Under the leadership of the NYC Department of Sanitation, and with the help of the Army Corps of Engineers, a system was established that would recycle as much of this overwhelming waste as possible. Much of the steel was sorted out at the WTC site and barged to two steel recycling plants in New Jersey. Barges were used since they were more efficient than trucking it through the streets. The rest of the debris was barged to the recently closed Fresh Kills Landfill on Staten Island, where law enforcement required that it be screened for potential criminal evidence, as well as, personal belongings and body parts.

Initially, folks were using small rakes to hunt for clues that could help identify victims. But then, a small company in Montgomery, N.Y., near the Village of Maybrook, offered technology that helped speed the process. The Taylor Recycling Facility actually started in 1956 as a tree service that processed land-clearing debris and turned it into mulch. But in the late 80's, because of changes in state laws, it found itself in the Construction and Demolition business.

They became one of the first DEC permitted C & D recycling facilities in the state. Over the years, they refined their system of collecting concrete, bricks, masonry material, wood (even telephone poles), carpeting, wall coverings, plaster, drywall, plumbing fixtures, insulation, glass, plastic, pipe, metals, and many other demolition items. They developed a state of the art sorting process that allows them to recycle 97% of the material they receive. They are one of the few companies who recycle wallboard and have a contract to supply gypsum to U.S. Gypsum. When Matt Thorp, NYRWA Secretary/Treasurer from Maybrook, accompanied me to their facility, I was extremely impressed at the organization, efficiency and cleanliness of their operation.

After reading about the time consuming and back breaking method that was being used to sift through the Twin Towers debris, they immediately offered help and told authorities about their technology that could sort the debris faster and easier. Their offer was accepted within hours and they became part of this enormous task. They brought in machinery that separated the waste with screening equipment, divided the rubble based on size, and sent the metal pieces, concrete chunks and other items to a pair of conveyors. The conveyors were housed in greenhouse like structures and officials in body suits and respirators combed items moving down the 40-foot conveyor. Debris was moved from the barges into trucks that dropped it at the old landfill. The rubble was searched for big metal pieces and the rest of the steel, concrete and debris were dumped into a primary screen. The screen vibrated to separate pieces of 6 inches or larger onto one conveyor belt and smaller items were deposited on a different belt. A secondary screen then filtered out small dirt material.

Personal items found among the debris were placed in plastic buckets. Aside from body parts, agents found badges, social security cards, watches,

wallets and clothing. By January 2002, about 10,000 pieces of personal belongings had been recovered. It was exhausting and emotional work. Operations went on around the clock with two twelve-hour shifts. When a wedding ring was found, it really hit home to a number of the workers.

New York City, The Army Corps of Engineers, and the Federal Government recognized Taylor Recycling for their efforts. Toward the end of the project they were awarded one of the final “Ground Zero” bids to process 2,800 tons of wood equipment mats that had supported the cranes and heavy equipment used at the site. They were one of the last to leave the Fresh Kills demolition area.

This work also left a lasting impression on Taylor Recycling. They donated \$275,000 to Orange County to help establish a September 11th Memorial Rose Garden at the county’s Arboretum in Hamptonburgh, N.Y. The memorial honors the residents of Orange County affected by this tragic event.

New York has produced many amazing things. A canal system that brought practically all of the country’s trade through our state, the first “tall buildings”, a modern subway system, and one of the world’s largest water systems, are among just a few of the fetes that people from this state have accomplished. As unfortunate as it was, the clean up of New York’s highest building, the World Trade Center, has to be added to that list.