

Orange dumps East Coast for new firm

Jersey City scavenger buys sanitation contract during federal bankruptcy proceedings

By Chris Sykes Staff Writer, Orange Transcript

In the wake of ongoing complaints about the city's garbage collection firm, city officials last week announced a new contractor.

A spokesman for Mayor Eldridge Hawkins Jr. announced Dec. 9 that a bankruptcy judge in Newark awarded Joseph Smentkowski Inc. of Jersey City the Orange garbage collection and hauling contract formerly held by East Coast Sanitation. Under the new deal, Smentkowski will "provide uninterrupted service to Orange and collection days and price will remain the same."

City officials Tuesday issued a press release concerning the change.

According to Frank Baraff, who does public relations for the city, the Smentkowski firm purchased the assets of East Coast, including Orange's contract.

"East Coast Sanitation is bankrupt and is going out of business as a result of a \$25 million judgment against the contractor in a civil suit," Baraff said. "In a lawsuit against East Coast Sanitation filed by Suburban Disposal of Fairfield, Superior Court Judge Claude Coleman found that East Coast didn't have worker's compensation or liability insurance and that the company didn't comply with performance- bond requirements, both required by the state's Environmental Rights Act. Orange has been extremely dissatisfied with the performance of East Coast Sanitation under its contract."

As a result of the city's investigation of East Coast Sanitation earlier this year, Baraff said Orange received negotiated fines or penalties of approximately \$4,300 for violations of its contract. In addition, Baraff said the city's file on the investigation was forwarded to the state comptroller and Essex County Prosecutor's Office.

"The Public Works Department has been inundated with residents' complaints over the past year regarding the collection service, and has sent numerous letters and averaged 10 calls daily to East Coast to facilitate service," said Baraff. "At the time of purchase, the city had initiated an additional \$50,000 in fines for 500 contract violations. Beyond the fines assessed and paid, the city had made it clear that it would move to terminate the contract if any further breaches occurred."

The investigation by Orange included surveillance involving personnel from the Police Department and the mayor's Quality of Life Task Force. They documented a number of improprieties including improper garbage pickup, receiving gratuities from residents and possibly others for picking up items and materials they should not, and picking up waste outside the boundaries of Orange on city time.

"The investigation found evidence that East Coast Sanitation is charging Orange tipping fees for garbage and trash that does not originate from within the city," Hawkins said during a press conference following the investigation. "On one occasion a truck was tracked from its point of entry into the city, stopped and inspected before it made any pickups, and found to be three-quarters full before they had even made any stop in Orange. The contract requires that trucks be empty when they enter the city and provides a mandatory \$1,000 fine for violations."