

80th Birthday Wish Fulfilled

By Carolyn C. Workman

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Have you ever noticed a person who is absolutely the right one for the job they perform? One who is so enthusiastic about their work they inspire others to do their best and support each other? This past fall, for my 80th birthday, such a person showed me and a friend how Baltimore County Bureau of Solid Waste Management handles trash and recyclables.

Michael R. Beichler, facility engineer, gave an hour of his time to view and explain the inner workings of this operation. He has degrees in engineering and business, and has designed the equipment being used to sort, shred, pulverize and bale that which comes from this large county.

All glass is ground into sand-like material to be used for pipe bedding and in other ways. Plastic bottles, types 1 and 2, are run through another machine that puts holes in them and crushes them into large bundles that are wired and sold to the highest bidder.

The aluminum cans are flattened and baled to be sold to generate funds for the county. A large magnet picks up metal cans as they go through the conveyor. These cans are smashed into large blocks to be used to make iron and steel.

Cardboard and all kinds of paper are sorted on conveyers which lift the light newspaper to be baled separately. Much of the paper is sold to China. They use it to make containers to ship goods back to us and to other countries. Some paper goes to a paper company in the south.

“China has few trees with which to make paper pulp. Their container ships bring goods here and take our paper back with them to avoid empty ships,” Beichler said.

As a child of the Great Depression in Indiana, I learned to save everything so it could be repaired, used again in another form or shared with another who had less than our family. Now, citizens are encouraged, but really not urged in any concrete way, to make use of the recycling operations in our communities.

Perhaps most of us do not have as sophisticated a system as Baltimore County, but all of us can do something to improve the environment and help our communities and world.

Local governments save money when we recycle. In Baltimore County, 430,000 tons of trash is generated and only 41,000 tons have been placed out for recycling. Of the trash, one third is sent to a Virginia landfill, one third remains in the county landfill and one third goes to Baltimore City to burn to generate energy.

Beichler stressed that this is a business and the cost to the county is \$38 for each ton of trash collected. The county receives \$112 per ton of revenue for recyclables. Therefore, as a business, and a savings to our county tax base, it pays us to recycle.

Why then, do not folks take this seriously? I live in a cul de sac in a development of about 1,500 homes. I am the only one in my court who puts out recycling materials that are collected at my door weekly. I do not even need to take them to a center -- the county picks it up for me!

Beichler loves his job and hopes to spend the rest of his career helping others learn his skills. He oversees 22 employees on the production line and the 100 employees who operate Baltimore County disposal and recycling facilities. This workforce includes inmates from the county detention center who are paid \$5 per day. He has hired several former inmates who have served their time.

My longtime wish to realize the difference we can make in our local communities and to meet committed government servants who help us in our efforts came true on a fall day amidst the recycling.

Carolyn C. Workman is a member of St. Mark's on the Hill, helping with outreach, education, worship and finance. As a member of The Society of the Companions of the Holy Cross, intercessory prayer, social justice and simplicity of life are practiced. Conservation is a passion. As an active clinical social worker she sees injustice and waste in her community and is thankful for the strength God gives her to continue at 80.