

# Trash Talk

## A sanitation worker looks forward to retirement and reflects on 20 years in the department

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As the sun shines brightly in the sky overhead, a homeless man about 75 years old named Sam is spraying water with a garden hose. Dressed in tattered but clean clothes he is diligently cleaning the sidewalk in front of Manhattan 10, a sanitation depot is located at Park Avenue between 131st and 132nd street in Harlem, New York. Joseph Hayward watches and leans forward to take off a pair of sunglasses to make sure that Sam has not overlooked any part of the pavement.

Hayward, 58, is relaxing on a green plastic chair underneath a tree drinking a tall glass of iced water and enjoying his afternoon break. A native New Yorker and a married father of three adult daughters Hayward is an Operations Assistant District Clerk and a member of Local 831, a union for sanitation employees that has been in existence for about a half century. He wears a green uniform with the traditional medical symbol in yellow set on an aqua background with a bright red S in the center. Surrounding the logo are the words "The City of New York Department of Sanitation."

Hayward says the "san men," as department employees call themselves often pay out a few dollars to homeless as a charitable act. "We especially want to help the senior citizens since some of them don't even get a welfare check."

Hayward feels lucky. He began working for the sanitation department in 1980 because of benefits such as salary, medical coverage and stability. Now, he's eligible for a "decent" pension after 20 years. He plans to retire - without a salary or medical penalty - after he reaches 55 years of age. "Before 1980, you had to work at least thirty years before you could retire and get a decent pension. Now I don't have to," he explains.

Hayward was born on November 13, 1945 and raised a few blocks away in the Abraham Lincoln Projects, a New York City housing development. He graduated from Evander High School located in the Bronx, New York in 1963 and worked infrequently at various jobs. "Most of the jobs were either unstable or short term. At that time, I had three small children and a wife and no money was coming in," he says. "My luck changed when I got this job and this location because it is convenient working a few blocks away from my home."

According to Mr. Hayward, each employee of the Sanitation Department is put into a "Tier" which is the classification of people who came into the Sanitation Department during certain times. The earlier the start date, the better the retirement eligibility and benefits. Hayward says he will be entitled to 60% of his salary for the rest of his life. "It would have been higher but management does not like to give people in my 'Tier' any overtime because they



PHOTO: LENORE SCHULTZ

know that we will soon be retiring," he says.

Hayward says one reason he's calling it quits is the lack of opportunities for advancement in the department for people his age. "Management is not cooperative with us 'old timers' and they are promoting the younger crew," he says. "They realize that some of us are not going to be around for another ten or 20 years and they are looking for younger people to invest their time in the company." However, despite the fact that college recently became available to sanitation employees and some of

the positions require additional education, Hayward has chosen not to take advantage of the opportunity. "College is for the young folk - the 20- and 30-year-olds. It's not for me because I'm too old and set in my ways to go back to school." Hayward admits, however, that he knows of about 25 people his age in the system are trying to get their college degrees. He laughs aloud because he said he hopes that his wife does not find out about some of those people are going to college because she will want him to do the same.

Hayward says the city's Sanitation Department transports over 13,000 tons of residential and institutional refuse and recyclables a day. The Sanitation Department provides service two to three times a week. To assist in the tremendous pick-ups and street cleaning, Sanitation has a Work Experience Program (WEP) that employs about 4,000 people on city welfare rolls. There are currently 50 WEP workers at the Manhattan 10 location. They do not wear the required green sanitation uniform but instead put on orange safety vests over their regular clothing. Mayor Rudolph Giuliani

formed WEP program to employ what the city deems to be able-bodied recipients of public assistance to work for the City in exchange for their subsidies. In fact, the number of hours they work is determined by the value of their monthly cash payments and food stamps.

The Department of Sanitation's street cleaning performance is measured independently by the Mayor's Office of Operations, which issues a monthly "Scorecard." The locations inspected by the Mayor's Office are randomly chosen without the prior knowledge of the Sanitation Department. Therefore, the Sanitation Department must actively ensure that pick-ups are timely.

Hayward has mixed feelings about the WEP workers because on one hand, it makes his job easier but on the other, overtime is not plentiful because of the WEP workers. He expressed sympathy for some of the WEP participants because some of them work up to 70 hours bi-weekly just to get a welfare check. He feels that some of them work even harder than some of the regular Sanitation Department employees.

Hayward says before the WEP workers started there were only two regular sanitation workers on a collection truck for an eight-hour shift. The two would pick up garbage on both the east and west sides of a 45-block stretch of the city. Hayward's shift alternates with Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays or Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays schedules.

There have been some harrowing experiences on the job. Hayward recalls one incident in September, 1990 on one of his regular routes which runs from 110th to 155th Streets between Fifth and St. Nicholas Avenues in New York City. His nose wrin-

kles when he retells the story. "I went to pick-up a black plastic bag that was lying in an alley. There was a horrible odor coming from inside the bag. When I pulled the plastic bag towards me, I noticed a human leg sticking out. I immediately called the New York City Police Department and reported my finding. I then called the supervisor at Manhattan 10 depot that was on duty at the time."

When the police arrived, they asked Hayward how he knew he had discovered a body. "I said, 'Shucks I know what a human leg looks like.'" The police also asked Hayward the sex of the body and where exactly did he find the body. Hayward laughed and said, "When I finally got home and told my wife what happened, she made me wash my hands several times that evening. I can honestly say that was the worst and scariest day of my life since I started working for the Department."

Nevertheless, Hayward enjoys working for the Sanitation Department and has formed long-term friendships with some of the employees. One particular employee, William Cherry, 60, and another native New Yorker has been friends with Hayward since 1985. Cherry has worked at the Manhattan 10 depot for about 25 years. Cherry says, "Sometimes Joe and I get together on the weekends to shoot pool or bowl at places in the Bronx."

The sun is beginning to set for the day and Hayward rises from his chair and crosses the street to complete the final minutes of his shift at Manhattan 10. He walks over to Sam, who had been cleaning the sidewalk in front of the depot and passes a few dollars to him. After that, he plans to head home.