

THE SUN

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TRASH SERVICE

City wooed by waste hauler

Council votes to negotiate new garbage contract with TDS

By JOSH PHERIGO

The Georgetown City Council this week chose to continue the city's relationship with a company that has ingrained itself into the heart of the community – one bag of garbage at a time.

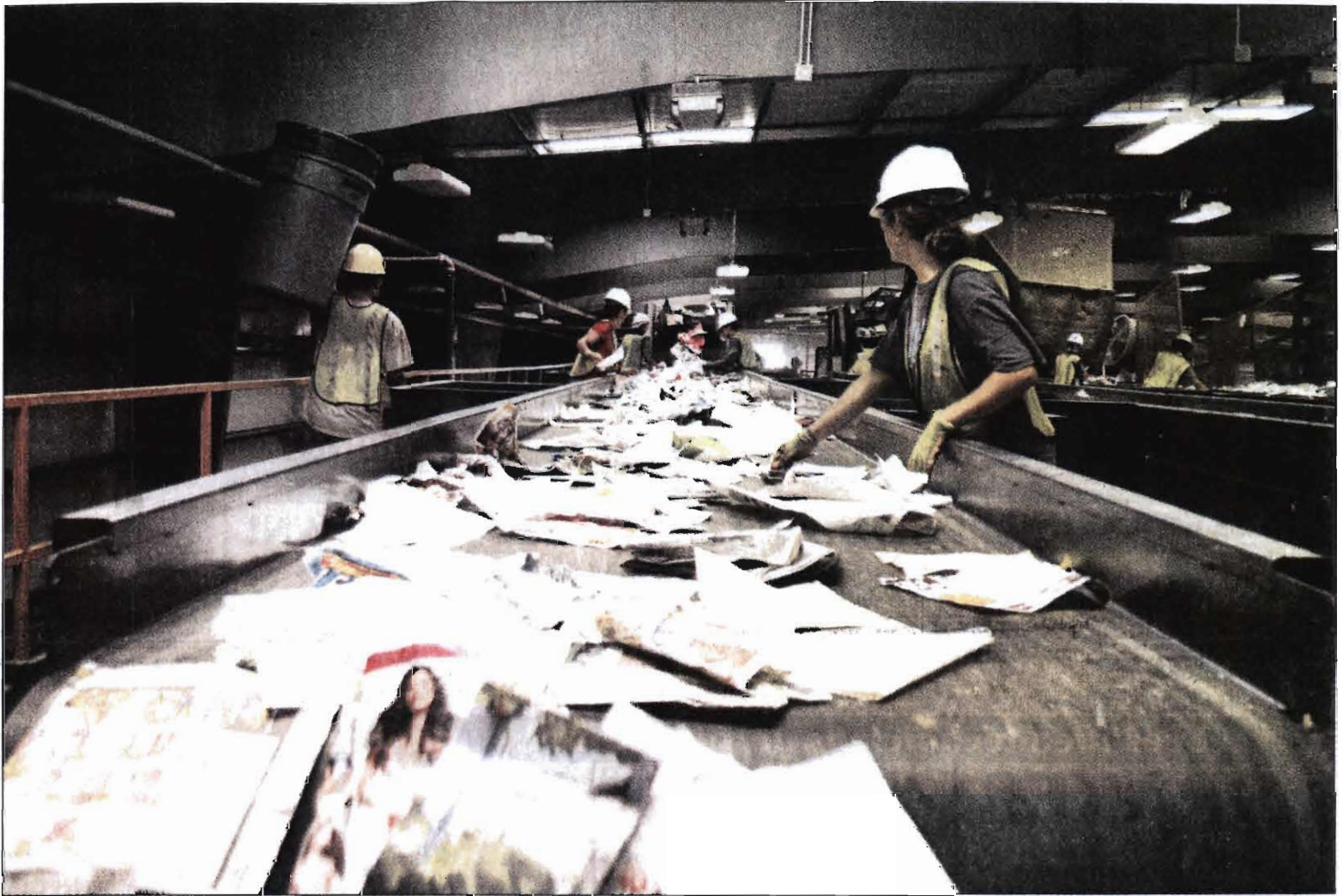
In a contested vote last fall, the council decided by a 4 to 3 margin that, after fourteen years with the same solid waste collection contractor, and despite protests from residents, it was time to sow some oats.

However, after a six-month bidding process that evaluated five other companies on factors, including price, experience, financial capacity and methodology, staff told council on Tuesday they had a good thing all along.

Council agreed, voting to open negotiations with Texas Disposal Systems for a new five-year waste and recycling contract that would expand services.

Continued on 6A





Photos by Josh Pherigo

Above, workers separate paper on a conveyor belt inside TDS' Materials Recovery facility. Below, a pile of recyclable material waits to be sorted Thursday at the Texas Disposal Systems Landfill.

Continued from 1A

The deal hasn't yet been inked — two other companies await consideration if talks with TDS break down — but if the public comments at Tuesday's meeting were any indication, residents' choice was clear.

"Upon arrival [in Georgetown] we discovered two jewels: the Georgetown recreation center and Texas Disposal Systems," said resident Walt Doering, who presented a PowerPoint and drew applause from the crowd after his comments. "It's a great business, and great businesses are not only hard to find, build and maintain, but also to retain."

Other residents echoed those sentiments.

Some praised the company's commitment to environmental standards, others told of TDS' philanthropic work with school children and local non-profits. Several speakers cited the company's customer service record.

"As people in life, we're known by the company we keep," said Georgetown resident Rick Williamson. "As a city, you're known by the contractors you keep, and this is certainly a contractor you want to keep."



A Texas Disposal Services truck offloads solid waste into the TDS Landfill in Creedmoor. The 2,000-acre property serves as the headquarters and base of operations for the family-owned company, which operates in 33 counties.

Georgetown.

The staff's recommendation, while positive, wasn't quite as convincing.

The pitch

Based solely on the city's proposal requirements, assistant city manager Jim Briggs said, three of the contractors

picked up at the curb. The city wants the contractor to stop accepting single bags at the curb and it wants green waste pickup limited to twice a year.

Firms were allowed to bid on any, all or a combination of services, including residential, commercial, roll-away service, and operation of the city's transfer station.

The proposals were kept closed to the public, but TDS spokeswoman Verna Browning said the company's pitch offered more services than the city requested.

Before the vote, councilman Tommy Gonzalez asked Mr. Briggs if he felt the bid process was beneficial even though the city circled back to the same recommendation staff made last fall.

Including staff time and consulting fees, Mr. Briggs had estimated the bid process cost the city about \$200,000.

"The one thing I gained out of the process was that the second- and third-highest proposers are quality firms as well," Mr. Briggs said. "There are other quality folks out there, and that's good to know."

Despite being passed over in favor of a more expensive bid by the home team, Allied Waste General Manager David Kuhn said he felt the city's evaluation was fair and open.

"I have no issues with the process," Mr. Kuhn said. "I congratulate TDS on a successful proposal."

Creedmoor

On a recent sunny afternoon in a small pocket of the 2,000 rolling acres that form the TDS headquarters and landfill in southeastern Travis County, 27-year-old Adam Gregory grips a warm metal rail, leans forward and calls to the company rhinoceros.

"Rowdy," he says, bellowing the name three times. "Here, boy."

One hundred yards away, on the other side of two deceptively thin fences, a 4,000 pound African White Rhino slowly lumbers to his feet.

Mr. Gregory cups his hands and calls again. The animal stays put.

"I guess he likes the shade," says Mr. Gregory, an executive in the family business his father and uncle founded. "He usually comes when he's called."

Rowdy the Rhino, a favorite stop for visitors taking their first tour of the expansive TDS facility near Creedmoor, is just one of more than 3,000 animals the company maintains on the outer portion of its property. The TDS Exotic Game Ranch has an on-site veterinarian, a full-time staff and an event pavilion that the company provides free for charity fund-raisers. And like everything else about the Creedmoor facilities, it's been repurposed to make money.

The ranch forms a government-mandated buffer zone between neighboring proper-

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Wearing the company's distinctive neon green reflective vests, TDS employees sat side-by-side in several rows during the council's comments and discussion.

TDS manager Gary Hertel asked the employees to stand and be recognized for their hard work.

"These are the faces of the service," Mr. Hertel said as the audience and council applauded. "They live in this community. They're raising their kids here, and it's been a long seven months wondering if you're going to have a job or not."

All told, the public comments painted a glowing portrait of a company that has gone out of its way to incorporate itself into the fabric of

were highly qualified: Allied Waste of Austin, Central Texas Refuse and Texas Disposal Systems.

"Because of the fact that we've had such a good response and excellent firms to be able to choose from, it's made this process very difficult," Mr. Briggs said.

In its new contract, which could run as high as \$25 million, the city asked for several added service components.

First, the city wants single-stream recycling, a service that would replace the 18 gallon residential recycling tubs with full-size carts. Additionally, staff requested adding more materials, including plastic types three through seven and cardboard, to the list that residents can have

ties and the landfill. Instead of leaving it empty or cultivating a rural golf course, as some companies do, TDS breeds dozens of exotic species and sells many of them for profit.

"Neighbors like having an exotic ranch in their backyard," Mr. Gregory said.

The 8,000 square-foot pavilion sits atop a ridge directly downwind from the landfill, a fact, Mr. Gregory said, the company proudly announces to unassuming guests at every black-tie fundraisers. When guests realize there's no odor, they're impressed, Mr. Gregory says.

"The entertainment pavilion acts as our biggest lobbyist," he says. "We make no secret of that."

There in lies the strategy.

In an industry where the competition is stiff and the margins are slim, lasting impressions can, sometimes,

make all the difference, Mr. Gregory said.

"We're not usually going to be the lowest bid," he said. "But we focus on customer service and community interaction."

Whether that means teaching Georgetown ISD students how to compost their cafeteria food, offering to jumpstart a neighbors car or donating mulch to community gardens, TDS has found a way to cash-in by offering pleasant service in a dirty business.



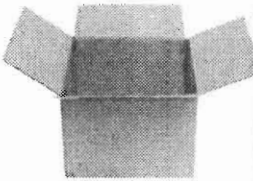
Standing along the gravel edge of the open dump site as earth movers push and compact the piles or trash, Adam Gregory motions to the garbage of more than 100,000 central Texas homes. The odor, here, is noticeable.

"It smells like money to me," he says.

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CURBSIDE RECYCLING

Recycling changes are on the way. Georgetown is moving to a single-stream recycling program beginning this fall. Full-size carts will replace the 18-gallon bins at residential homes. Customers will also be allowed to recycle a wider range of materials from home. Here are a few of them:

	<p>PLASTICS 1 Clear plastic bottles: Soda bottles, water bottles.</p>	<p>Now: Yes October 1: Yes</p>
	<p>PLASTICS 2 Colored plastic: milk jugs, butter tubs, detergent bottles.</p>	<p>Now: Yes October 1: Yes</p>
	<p>PLASTICS 3-7 Kitchen wrap, most shampoo bottles, plastic bags, juice boxes.</p>	<p>Now: No October 1: Yes</p>
	<p>CARDBOARD Cereal boxes, frozen dinner containers,</p>	<p>Now: No October 1: Yes</p>

Veronica Rosalez

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Photos by Josh Pherigo

Rowdy the Rhino lays in the shade a few feet away from one of the dozens of Blackbuck Antelope that graze on the Exotic Game Ranch at the TDS landfill and headquarters in Creedmore.