

# County talks trash

Citizens learn about solid-waste operation and benefits of recycling



Gary Gentry holds up a pizza box while Robert Mills places a piece of lumber on the table during a trash sorting competition at a Citizen Engagement Series event hosted by Leon County at the Solid Waste Management Facility. MICHAEL SCHWARZ/SPECIAL TO THE DEMOCRAT

## By Tamaryn Waters

Democrat staff writer  
@tamarynwaters on Twitter.com

On trash days, city and county curbs are lined with garbage and recycling bins but few residents can answer: Where does my trash go from here?

It depends on what's being tossed. Dozens of curious residents spent Thursday evening hearing more and posing questions about Leon County's \$8-million solid-waste operation during a citizen engagement event. They learned curbside collection for trash, recyclables and yard debris is just the beginning of a long, involved process.

Suzanna Thomas dumped items at the Solid Waste Facility on Apalachee Parkway after remodeling her home, but never toured the grounds. She got her chance during the event's bus tour. Thomas brought her daughter Hannah Pudvah, 9, and son, Matthew Pudvah, 6, along because she wanted to impart a life lesson.

"I'm a big advocate for recycling," Thomas said. "Hannah is really into the earth. Their era right now is peace, love and happiness. I just wanted to educate them on why we need to recycle."

Hannah, sitting within earshot of her mom, nodded in agreement.

"I like it because you get to make new stuff out of (trash)," said Hannah, adding she makes sure to recycle at school, too. "Once I made a wallet out of a milk carton."

During the bus tour, those along for the ride learned tires collected at the site are used for fuel and materials for playgrounds, along with the facility's environmental features. To



Machinery tops a plastic-lined landfill at the Leon County Solid Waste Management Facility on Thursday.

MICHAEL SCHWARZ/SPECIAL TO THE DEMOCRAT

some residents' surprise, each person in Leon County produces about 7.5 pounds of trash per day, said Norm Thomas, the county's solid waste director.

Last year, the county collected enough trash to fill Doak Campbell Stadium eight times.

Trash goes from the curb to the county's transfer station, and the next stop is a landfill in Jackson County. Bulky items, such as sofas, chairs and appliances, are picked up and sent to Marpan Recycling off Woodville Highway. The county has eight facilities where residents can bring trash and other items.

The Apalachee Parkway facility, operated by 34 employees, is also the site for recycling paint and making mulch out of yard waste that's then

## HERE'S SOME QUICK STATS FROM THE 2012 FISCAL YEAR:

**173,000** tons of trash went to the Leon County landfill during the 2012 fiscal year.

**17,000** tons of yard debris was collected at Apalachee Solid Waste Facility.

**18,000** gallons of paint, about 75 percent, was recycled by the facility.

**40,345** tons of waste is recycled by Marpan Recycling at its facility on Woodville Highway.

**10,000** tons of cardboard was recycled at the The Apalachee Solid Waste Facility.

Source: Leon County Solid Waste Operations

made available to the public.

The county chose its solid-waste operation as its fifth citizen series as a way to eliminate the mystery about what happens beyond the curb, along with educating people on the wide array of potential recyclables.

"We want folks to know kind of where their money goes when they have to pay taxes or fees. We want them to know what we are doing for the environment and protection of human health," Thomas said.

The event also gave residents a chance to play in trash, sort of.

Each table of attendees represented a mock hauling company. In

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10 minutes, teams were challenged to sort through 30 items placed in a paper bag and decide their appropriate destination based on laminated pictures of various facilities.

The interactive game was a lively moment .

“There are always improvements on what we can recycle,” said Amy Hutson, who came because she wanted to know her recycling options. “You start off very small.



**Methane gas produced by waste materials in the landfill is burned at a flare station at the Leon County landfill on Thursday.** MICHAEL SCHWARZ/SPECIAL TO THE DEMOCRAT

First it was just aluminum and plastic, and now we are expanding to all these different things. And I

need to know what they are.

Margie Davis, an avid recycler herself, said

more residents need to make time for learning where trash goes, from start to finish.

In the end, she said efforts will “help make the environment cleaner and fresher.”

The state has challenged all counties to reach the lofty goal of recycling 75 percent of all solid waste collected by 2020. Leon County’s at 39 percent now.

Before leaving the event, Suzanna Thomas said she wanted her children and others to take away one message: Trash goes somewhere. Please recycle.