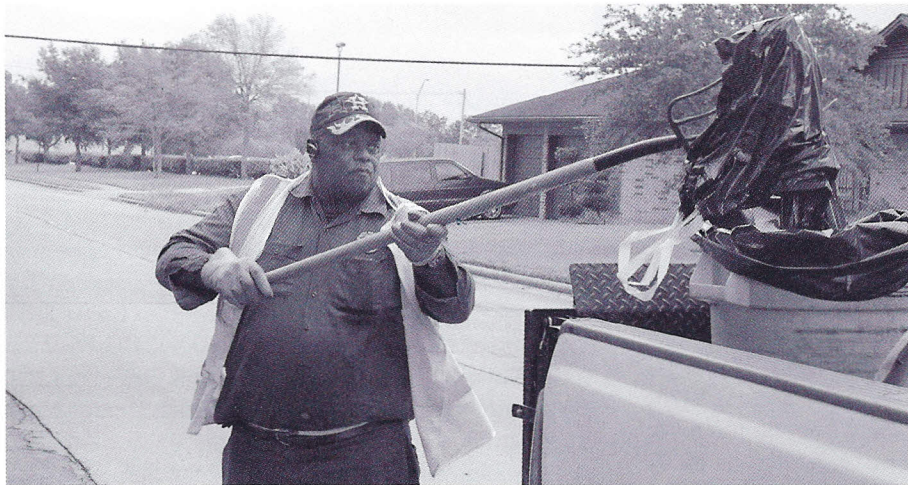


Where do dead dogs go? Green knows

Lee Green deals with stink, traffic and more stink while shoveling dead animals off the streets



Photos by Dave Schafer

Lee Green, Solid Waste Management senior sideloader, uses a pitchfork to pick up dead animals and dump them in the trash. This squirrel was bagged and left at the side of the road.

By Dave Schafer

The yellow dog is half-eaten by the maggots that cover its body. The rotting smell assaults the nose, crawls down the throat, and brings tears to the eyes.

Lee Green grabs a pitchfork and uses it to fold the body in half, scoop it up, and dump it into a 55-gallon plastic trash barrel. He moves as if there is no smell.

Scrap, shlump, tap, tap, tap.

The dog lands on top of the corpse of another dog and a mass of black fur that might have been a cat. They lay on top of a bloated raccoon.

Green pulls his collar over his nose and inhales the cologne he'd sprayed there.

"If you can't adapt to the smells, you

can't do this job," he says.

Green collects dead animals. He's one of three Solid Waste Management employees who scrap them up from city streets and rights-of-way. Then, they deliver them to a landfill for burial.

"Those are my most dedicated people, and they do the least pleasant job," says his supervisor, Tyrone Auzenne.

"We clean up the city," says Green, a senior sideloader, in a baritone so deep it's hoarse around the edges. By cleaning up animals, they eliminate health hazards and eyesores. "It's a tough job, but somebody has to do it."

Three minutes

Green clicks on his hazards, slows

down his white pickup and peers intensely out the front window. He has to watch for passing traffic as he looks for the dead dog reported on the 311 service request.

On a typical day, 40 to 50 service requests are divided between the three men.

In urban areas, the service requests have an address and not much more. In rural areas, sometimes there's not even a landmark.

"We can spend a lot of time looking for something that ain't there," Green says.

They're supposed to search one block in each direction for the corpse. But they do more. Later this day, Green will walk up and down a street and across a busy two-lane road with semis rumbling past looking for a missing deer body.

"Don't take anything for granted," he says. "Just because that animal's not at that address doesn't mean he's not there somewhere, and you may just have to go back for it tomorrow. That hurts you and your group."

The dead dog is supposedly at 12550 Fuqua. He's well past the 12500 block and still hasn't seen it, so Green makes a u-turn and goes back to look again.

Then he sees it, and a rigid dead cat up the road. He'll pick that up, too.

He pulls off to the side of the road and sits for a moment to get the feel of traffic. "I don't want to be a service request myself," he says.

He gets out, puts on blue rubber gloves, picks up the five-pronged pitchfork, and lowers the lift holding the trash barrel.

Scraap, shlump, tap, tap, tap.

Three minutes pass from arrival to departure.

Big bodies

"You ain't ever in your life smelled something as bad as a decomposing goat or horse," Green says as he drives down Fuqua near Cottingham looking for a horse body.

Large animals get priority because they have so much bacteria and their smell is so strong.

He can't get a horse in this truck. They have two bigger trucks with cherry pickers that pick up the horses and drop them into the large bed.

Because he likes to know what he's getting into, Green goes to check out the horse's position.

He drives down the road but doesn't see the horse. The road is empty, so he drives backwards, peering into the ditch that's overgrown with weeds. No horse.

He calls the woman who had made the service request, and she leads him down Cottingham to a lumpy blue tarp with a black hoof sticking out.

Before switching out to the bigger truck, Green has one more stop: a deer at the corner of Mykawa and Allison.

Not long ago, he had heaved a 250- to 300-pound cow out of the ditch at that intersection by its horns, sticking his nose down into the stink.

The stink. It always comes back to the stink.

It took him a week to get used to it. But, he says, "You have to adjust in life. That's the only way to survive.

"If you can get past the smell, the job isn't that hard. It takes a special type of person to do what I do and enjoy it. But I do enjoy it. And I want to shine at it."