

# GREEN LIVING Smithtown

*One Township Dedicated To Improving Long Island*

## Green Fleets Smithtown Makes History With Natural Gas

BY APRIL JIMENEZ  
ajimenez@longislandpress.com

Smithtown is one of the most historically rich towns on Long Island. One local legend has it that Native Americans told pioneer Richard Smith that he would be granted title to all the land he could ride across in one day on a bull. A statue of Whisper, the famous bull he rode, stands proudly at the head of the intersection of Jericho Turnpike and St. Johnland Road. Today, with all the strides

the township has made in the environmental field, some are saying that good old Whisper may need to be painted green soon—and that's just fine with residents.

The large town, encompassing 111.4 square miles, like its founder, is a pioneer. The entire township's environmental future changed on a fateful day in 2006 when it became a leader in the Green Movement. It started when Smithtown's

Director of Environmental Protection Russell Barnett attended the New York State Solid Waste Conference in Lake Sagamore and heard Joanna Underwood, founder of Energy Vision, a national nonprofit organization that analyzes and promotes pollution-free renewable energy sources. Underwood spoke about how diesel-powered refuse vehicles were essentially destroying the environment—more than



136,000 refuse trucks on American roadways emit exhaust that contains soot, smog-forming nitrogen oxides and a variety of carcinogens, while consuming huge amounts of petroleum-based diesel fuel. Averaging only 2.8 miles per gallon, each truck burns about 8,600 gallons of diesel fuel a year. After hearing those incredible numbers that afternoon, Barnett's head began buzzing with an idea for Smithtown's future.

"He came up after that session and wanted to know all he could about natural gas refuse vehicles," says Energy Vision's Underwood. "He did a lot of homework." Indeed he did. Barnett contacted fleet operators that were identified in Energy Vision's report "Greening Garbage Trucks," to hear about their experiences and gauge how he could make the ideas work for his town. He later proposed that the Town of Smithtown switch its fleet of trucks to natural gas—and history was made. In 2007 Smithtown became the first community on the East Coast to do this. Since then, other New

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York towns and municipalities have followed suit. The Town of Brookhaven is in the process of replacing more than 80 trucks, and three projects have been implemented in New York City. "Smithtown was an inspiring factor for all of them," says Underwood.

Barnett and the town were able to get the initiative underway within eight months. Barnett says,

"We put out the bid to haulers stipulating that natural gas trucks would need to be used." Many applied, but almost all the haulers had no experience, for there were no natural gas refuse trucks on Long Island at the time. "This was a very bold thing to do," says Underwood.

Nonetheless, the town got a very strong response. Those who won the bid had to buy new trucks, and learn how to operate them, according to Barnett. The trucks were in operation by January 2007. "It shows what can be done when there is a commitment to action and a long-term vision," says Underwood.

For Smithtown this was only the beginning. The town's experience with the refuse trucks was so good that it established a policy to buy vehicles that use only natural gas. Currently the town's fleet includes 22 compressed natural gas (CNG) refuse trucks, four highway dump trucks, one highway

department sweeper, one animal shelter van, one recreation van, two highway department pickup trucks, one municipal service facilities pickup truck, one comptroller car and two public safety cars. Smithtown received more than \$400,000 in federal funds to pay for alternative fuel vehicles.

Town Supervisor Patrick R. Vecchio was presented with the 2008 Trailblazer Award by the Greater Long Island Clean Cities Coalition (GLICCC), part of the United States Department of Energy Clean Cities Program. "Vecchio and the Town of Smithtown are [wholly] committed to reducing pollution and reliance on foreign oil," says GLICCC Chairman Ronald Gulmi. "So much so that when faced with the need to replace a town vehicle, the first question asked is, 'Can we get that in alternative fuel?'" And while everyone enjoys the chuckle at Smithtown's vehemence when it comes to the environment and natural gas, Vecchio knows it's no laughing matter.

Vecchio approximates that over the seven-year span of the contract, Smithtown residents will enjoy cleaner air and reduced costs, and the need for 2.5 million gallons of petroleum will be eliminated. And taxpayers and environmentalist alike will tell you that this is no joke. ☺

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