

# RECYCLING REVOLUTION

## McMinnville company turns trash into useful products

*Story by Trish Milburn • Photographs by Robin Conover*

Throughout history, there have been revolutionary inventions — the light bulb, the automobile, the microwave oven and the home computer. A company in McMinnville has developed a technology that may be added to the list of great inventions that substantially change how we do things.

Americans produce more than 220 million tons of household garbage each year, a large portion of which is

wheeled to the curb once a week and carted off to the nearest landfill. Recycling efforts have been around for decades, but the time and effort required keeps some people from making recycling a priority. How amazing would it be if that garbage could be recycled almost in its entirety without having to be separated into different recycling bins? That's exactly what WastAway Services, a division of BouldinCorp, has taken the first steps toward.

WastAway employees use a front-end loader to move piles of garbage into the conveyor system that will turn the trash into usable Fluff®.





Floyd Bouldin, chairman and CEO of BouldinCorp, shakes hands with Gov. Phil Bredesen after placing a bench made of extruded Fluff in the state capitol.

In June 2003, WastAway began accepting Warren County's household garbage, says Teddy Jones, director of marketing for WastAway. Instead of the county having to truck the garbage to a landfill, they simply back their trucks into WastAway's facilities and dump their loads. The unsorted garbage is placed on a conveyor system that takes it through a series of shredders and a 300-plus-degree pressure cooker that serves as a sanitation step. Recyclable metals are weeded out by the system, and these materials are sold to metal recyclers. By the time the garbage emerges from the other end of the process about 30 minutes after entering it, it bears no resemblance to its former self. In fact, it looks more like the name the company has given it — Fluff®.

After emerging from the conversion system, the Fluff is hauled to the company's Composite Products facility in Morrison, which is also home to BouldinCorp's corporate office.

This Fluff is used for various purposes, giving former household garbage a new life as a useful product. Warren County is home to several plant nurseries, and many nursery owners

use a mixture of Fluff and bark as a soil amendment because it requires less watering and provides micronutrients.

Terry Hines of Hale and Hines Nursery in McMinnville says using Fluff in the potting mix for their container trees is cheaper than using peat moss.

"We're happy with the product and the service," says Hines. "We have a good working relationship with WastAway."

The mixture of organic and inorganic materials in Fluff is also good for use in land reclamation. Two such land reclamation projects have been undertaken at Fort Campbell, Ky., and Fort Benning, Ga., with remarkable results.

Composite Products also is doing a lot of research and development to determine what products the Fluff can be used to make. By using an extruder to press the Fluff into a dense, compact building product, the company has constructed park benches, decking, landscape or building timbers, and outdoor trash cans. The products have the benefit of not deteriorating like wood and using waste to

**Composite Products®  
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away to make park  
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**Top left:** WastAway Marketing Manager Teddy Jones shows off some of the Fluff outside the company's Warren County facilities. Fluff is being used as a soil amendment in land reclamation efforts near McMinnville, above, and by plant nursery employees such as Antonio Villegas at Hale and Hines, left.

construct items that would have required the cutting of trees. And Jones points out the great irony of “a garbage can made out of garbage.”

Not only has the Warren County project helped keep tons of garbage out of landfills, it's aided the county in being awarded grants totaling more than \$220,000, money earmarked for new sanitation equipment and paving at county convenience centers. The county's high recycling rate of 95 percent — thanks to WastAway — was an impressive point in the grant applications.

Working with WastAway has also saved the county money since the sanitation department was having to truck the county's garbage 106 miles round-trip to the BFI land fill in Murfreesboro. Warren County is filled with caves and underground streams, so a landfill isn't possible there. So, working with Wast-



WastAway has saved gas costs, wear and tear on the sanitation trucks, and man-hours for the county.

“I think it’s an outstanding process,” says Steve Hillis, Warren County sanitation director.

In addition to cost savings for the county and the fact that more than 8,700 tons of Warren County garbage are not being dumped into a landfill each year, he cites the jobs WastAway has created and the way garbage is transformed into sanitary end products as benefits of WastAway’s operation.

Other counties are beginning to take notice of the success in Warren County. WastAway currently handles 40 tons of garbage a day, Jones says, but can handle up to 100 tons a day. Thus, the company is courting nearby counties such as Putnam and Coffee.

Even landfill owners can benefit from less garbage going into the ground. By having less garbage arriving now, it extends the life of the landfills. And there will still be a need

**Left: Newly created Fluff exits the patented conversion process. Above: Extruded Fluff can be used for building timbers, fencing, benches and many other durable products. The company continually does research and development to create even more uses for the revolutionary product and has long-term plans to help more communities keep their garbage out of landfills.**

**TRASH TO TREASURE**

For more information on WastAway:  
(931) 474-6019 or [www.wastaway.com](http://www.wastaway.com)

McMinnville

for landfills for that small percentage of garbage, 3 to 5 percent, that can’t be turned into Fluff.

WastAway’s recycling process seems to be one of those turning points in technology, one that has the bonus of being beneficial to both pocketbooks and the planet. If you have an open idea of what a treasure is, it’s a regular trash to treasure story. ☺