

Reader warning: The following article contains trash talk

BY MEG OLSON

Garbage pickup will be taken over next month by a self described "trash-head," Barbara Matthews and Mike Graham have sold the garbage hauling division of Point Distributors Inc. to Arthur Wilkowski,

the operations manager for Nooksack Valley Refuse. "It was just too much for me to handle," said Matthews, who ran the business. Wilkowski will run the company, renamed Point Roberts Recycling and Refuse, with his wife Debbie and brother Vern starting on March 1.

"He's probably the most knowledgeable person in the garbage business I've ever met," said Matthews of her successor. "If anyone can do anything with the business, it's Arthur. He lives and breathes garbage."

"When I want to do a little reading, I read about garbage," laughs Wilkowski. "Vern and I sit around and talk trash for hours."

While studying for a degree in environmental studies at Western Washington University, Wilkowski got an internship with the county solid waste division to study waste disposal patterns. "I spent the next two months getting up at 5 a.m. and driving around weighing people's garbage and recycling," he said. It was the beginning of a love affair with garbage for Wilkowski. He spent the next six years finishing his studies and working for the county and a local nonprofit recycling company.

Three years ago, Wilkowski was hired by Nooksack Valley Disposal as their recycling manager. He was quickly promoted to operations manager, a job he plans to keep while running Point Roberts Recycling and Refuse.

Vern Wilkowski will relocate to Point Roberts to manage the day to day operation of the company. He has worked as a driver for the San Juan Islands division of Nooksack Valley Disposal for the last two years.

Arthur Wilkowski and his family will continue to live in Bellingham, but will spend weekends on the Point running the transfer station. During the week, Wilkowski will work his current job and continue to serve on several county boards dealing with waste disposal issues.

"I can probably serve the Point well being a contact with resources in the county," Wilkowski said. He is currently a member of the county's solid waste action committee and the litter task force.

"As we get a handle on running the day to day operation, we'd like to step up and deal with some issues like dumping and litter on the Point," Wilkowski said. "Every piece of garbage that ends up on the ground being a problem for the community is garbage I'm not making money disposing of," said Wilkowski. Once the reasons they are doing it are eliminated and people stop dumping, my business prospers and so does the community."

Changes to garbage disposal on the Point will be coming slowly. "We'll spend the next couple of months getting to know the community and what they want from their waste disposal company," said Wilkowski. They will continue to operate out of the Point Distributors office until they can find their own office space. The telephone number will stay the same.

According to Wilkowski, garbage rates will stay the same with the new ownership, but rates for disposal at the dump will be reviewed and made more consistent. "We may eventually be breaking up the garbage pickup days so we have five regular days instead of a few long days," he added, "but it's too soon to really make a decision."

In the long term, Wilkowski has big plans for his little garbage company. "I've got all sorts of ideas," he said. "We hope to be doing more salvaging and reuse at the transfer station, and we hope to institute a program for used oil and antifreeze. We want to work with businesses to develop a commercial recycling program, which can be challenging especially on a smaller scale." Wilkowski hopes to introduce several service options besides monthly billing, such as prepaid tags for a single can pickup that can be purchased at the company offices. "I think that would be more reasonable for people coming down to stay at their cabins," he said.