

When a Yard Sale Won't Work, Call a Pro

The garage door doesn't want to open at first, and when **Frank Coyne** finally forces it up, I can see why.

It's embarrassed.

No doubt this garage has held many honorable things — cars, bikes, lawn furniture — but now all it's got is junk. And lots of it.

Frank and I are standing in an alley off North

Capitol Street NW, and it looks as if a tide of construction debris has washed in. Piled to the ceiling are mounds and mounds of chalky drywall, lengths of shattered molding, broken window frames, rusted pipes, empty caulking tubes, empty buckets of joint compound, empty fast food cartons. . . .

A contractor is renovating the house, and the garage is his dumping ground.

Frank has been hired to wrestle everything out and toss it in the 19-cubic-foot bed of his truck. He runs Junk in the Trunk LLC, and today I'm his worker.

"You'll ride through Washington on a big truck (wearing a lime green T-shirt) loading furniture, knick-knacks and misc. junk," Frank had written in his e-mail, making a day spent hauling junk sound like a field trip. Big truck! Green shirt! Knickknacks!

But our first stop is this disaster. Frank hands me a pair of brown cotton gloves — he prefers to work barehanded — and we set to work.

Junk removal is trendy now. It's the flip side of that other emblem of America's resolute acquisitiveness: the portable storage unit, so many of which stand sentry in our carports. When the POD is full, people call Frank to dispose of the former heirlooms.

At least, that's the sort of job Frank likes to get: furniture, knickknacks.

"Construction debris is what we hate doing most," he says. "It's a very competitive market, so you have to lower your prices. And it's heavy."

And awkward. Try flinging drywall up into a truck bed, its pulverized innards blowing back in your face like desert sand. Or vertical blinds, the slats wrapping around your arms like the tentacles of an octopus. Every other board I grab seems to bristle with rusty nails. Mr. Lockjaw, white courtesy phone!

There's something archaeological about the debris. When I realize that the clear plastic tray I've uncovered is the crisper drawer from a refrigerator,

I predict that we will soon find a refrigerator. And we do, muscling it together into the truck.

When the truck can hold no more, we pull a tarp over the contents and head to the trash transfer station near Brentwood. Frank is 32 and lives with his wife and baby daughter in LeDroit Park. He wasn't always into junk. A Boston University communications major, he worked at a software

company, then in marketing at Fannie Mae. He figured he'd get his MBA eventually, but when he realized his punishing work schedule wouldn't leave time for that, he quit Fannie Mae four years ago.

"I happened to have a pickup truck," he says. "When the stock option money ran out, I put an ad in the paper just to get some money." He said he'd haul junk.

"And here we are today."

Frank says he's different from a lot of junk guys. He tries to recycle as much as he can, giving usable items to thrift shops and nonprofit groups. It can affect the bottom line — hunting for the right charity burns up time; and time is, well, you know — but he thinks Washington is ready for a green junk hauler.

After we've dumped two tons of debris at the transfer station, we pick up more construction trash from a bakery in Columbia Heights, then clear moldy drywall and cabinets from a flooded River Road basement and finish up near the National Cathedral with the sort of job Frank loves.

Arrayed on the porch are a dresser, a rocking chair and matching ottoman, a bookcase, a mirror, a glass coffee table, a bag of clothes, a stainless steel kitchen shelf and a cat carrier full of china.

This client wants Frank to donate as much as he can and get her a receipt. But some people don't care. They just want that lovely feeling that comes from purging. Sometimes in those cases, Frank or his right-hand man, **Edwin Benitez**, will rescue an item, such as the carved Peruvian doll that sits on his dashboard, Our Lady of the Junk Truck.

Frank says one of his workers, an artist named **Chris Goodwin**, took the job partly so he could get good stuff. On his first day he found a pottery wheel that he sold on eBay for \$300.

"It was more than he made all week," says Frank.



BY JOHN KELLY — THE WASHINGTON POST

Frank Coyne, owner of Junk in the Trunk, says he tries to recycle as much as he can when hauling unwanted goods away.