

Recycling helps pay rescue bills



Great North Air Ambulance

In association with Durham Freemasons

FROM humble beginnings the GNAAS trading company has been transformed into an award-winning business. FAYE McBRIDE reports.

THEY say one man's trash is another man's treasure. That's certainly true of Steve Walton, who has shaped a business out of unwanted goods.

From the mountains of discarded clothing, mobile phones and printer cartridges that pour into his depot, Mr Walton has created a thriving recycling company.

It's an impressive achievement in itself. But the company has also become the biggest single donor to the Great North Air Ambulance Service (GNAAS).

Last year the company gave its whopping £500,000 profits to charity and this year it is set to better that by donating £700,000.

And there's more to add to the success story. Just last month the trading company was presented with the Business of the Year award, at the Star Radio Business Awards.

It's little wonder it's become a source of great personal pride for everyone at the charity, and in particular the man who thought it all up, chief executive Grahame Pickering.

But how does it all work? Well the short answer is thanks to you.

Once your unwanted goods are bagged up and collected they embark on a journey which sees

them turned into a way of saving lives. The collected waste is taken to

the GNAAS depot, in Newton Aycliffe, County Durham. A 50-strong team sort through tonnes of clothing every day - not to mention the extras that find their way into the bags.

Steve, a former trucker, said: "We get all sorts in there. You name it, people will put it in there, but we will find a use for it."

And that's the company's great skill, seeing a marketable use in something you or I would simply cast aside. Mr Walton and his team must be pretty good at spotting that use because demand for their recycled treasures is growing. With it has grown the size of their operation. No longer run out of a couple of containers in a truck stop, the business is now housed in three warehouses on the Aycliffe industrial estate. It is from here that five collection teams are dispatched daily to the far reaches of the GNAAS

boundaries - from Berwick, Northumberland, to Dumfries and Galloway, in Scotland, and Scarborough and York, in the south (not to mention Teesside, Tyneside, and Wearside in between).

Nearly all of the clothes are sold abroad. Such is the international reputation of the trading company the Polish buyers don't even need the GNAAS bags sorting before they are sent - they trust everything inside will be of sufficient quality.

Steve said: "They sell it in Poland as

Green Helicopter Clothing. They know it's high quality. We don't need to sell it - it sells itself. It's because there is a strong market for it. The Polish customer will buy good quality used clothing over cheaper new goods."

Up to 14 trucks a month make the trek from Newton Aycliffe to Poland to feed the insatiable appetite for Green Helicopter threads.

Then there are the mobile phones and printer cartridges. The business model has proved so successful it has attracted rival operators into the market place. "We have thefts every day," Steve said.

If you want to help this successful charitable company make sure you check for ID and air ambulance logos. Then the life-saving can continue.

"We get all sorts in there. You name it, people will put it in there, but we will find a use for it"





VITAL DONATIONS Julie Petitjean with some of the bags which keep the Great North Air Ambulance flying to the rescue

