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Christmas trees still have plenty to give

Turned to mulch for residents

By Mollie Gray
Staff Writer

CLIFTON — Now that the ornaments have come off and the lights boxed up for next year, it seems as though the Christmas tree has no more use. Not so in Clifton, where in the tree becomes more than just a holiday tradition.

The City Public Works Department has begun the month-long process of collecting thousands of wilted and dried Christmas trees. After each collection, the dismantled parts are transported to the City's "tub grinder" at the Public Works yard where they are chopped up and turned into mulch. The mulch is stored until the spring when the planting season arrives. Then it becomes available to residents and landscapers.

The system is not a new concept. Many other cities across the country have also developed a second use for Christmas trees.

Approximately 30 to 35 million real Christmas trees are sold in the U.S. every year, according to the National Christmas Tree Association. The Association estimates that 93 percent of the trees are recycled either through community programs or individual yards and gardens.

In Indiana for example, environmental groups have used recycled Christmas trees in wildlife rehabilitation sites. In Louisiana, the trees have been turned into

fences that help combat erosion and slow wave action along the Gulf Coast. Since 1986, the program has created eight miles worth of tree fences and restored 250 to 300 acres of marshland.

Here in Clifton, somewhere between 6,600 and 7,200 trees are picked up and reused after each Christmas, City Recycling Coordinator Al DuBois said. With an average tree weighing 25 pounds, more than 37 tons of reusable materials are then composted and nutrients returned to the soil.

"It's all done here in Clifton," DuBois said. "Our program is recycling. We've taken recycling in Clifton and we've become a sustainable community."

If the trees were thrown into the landfill and covered up they would release a methane gas, DuBois added. The methane, also a greenhouse gas, becomes a contributor to global warming. Recycling the trees also reduces energy usage and the amount of money individuals would have to dish out in buying mulch for their own projects.

The process of gathering all the trees begins immediately after New Year's Day. Residents can leave their trees, stripped of all ornaments and tinsel, on the curb for pick-up. Starting in March, piles of mulch are placed outside City Hall where they are available to City residents.

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STAFF PHOTO/FRAN SAMETH

Clifton will collect Christmas trees left at curbside throughout the month of January. The trees will be turned to mulch available to residents in the spring.

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