

# POTTSTOWN CITIZENS FOR Enlightened LEADERSHIP

## Recycling: It's a big deal

It's great to be first in the nation for something positive. Pottstown is now America's first community to have curbside recycling of flexible plastic packaging materials such as grocery bags, food pouches, and bubble wrap.

J.P. Mascaro has been collecting recycled materials in blue bins from Pottstown's 8,000 residential customers for 10 years. Now residents can throw all kinds of flexible plastic into the bins as well. Pottstown was chosen for the pilot project because of its history with the company.

Plastic is one of the world's most common manufactured materials. Worldwide production has skyrocketed from 2 million tons in 1950 to more than 380 million tons today, and packaging is by far the most common use.

The very qualities that make plastic so popular — it's cheap, versatile, lightweight, and long-lasting — also means it doesn't biodegrade in a landfill.

Moreover, 8 million tons of plastic end up in our oceans annually, killing birds and marine life through entanglement and ingestion.

More than half of the world's plastic is landfilled; about a quarter is incinerated; and less than 20 percent is recycled. Until now, flexible plastic has been particularly difficult to recycle because it gums up conventional sorting equipment.

In recent years, a consortium of major corporations that use a lot of plastic — like Proctor and Gamble,

Target, Dow Chemical, Pepsico and Nestle — has been researching new uses for recycled plastic, in particular, flexible plastic.

But first, it has to be sorted out of the waste stream, and thanks to a \$2.8 million consortium grant, and its own investment, J.P. Mascaro has

installed automatic optical equipment in its Exeter recycling facility that can sort out flexible plastic for bailing.

It is then shipped to companies that convert the material into Rflex, a base material used to make curbs and sidewalks, shipping pallets, thick mats, and other

products.

Mascaro already sorts about 40 different materials for recycling, most of which are various types of paper products. Glass is another major recycling material.

Mascaro says it's always been able to find markets for its recycled materials.

However, about 10 to 15 percent of the stuff placed in Pottstown's recycling bins can't be used and ends up in Mascaro's Pioneer Crossing Landfill, adjacent to the recycling center.

After a 12-to 18-month trial period, Mascaro plans to expand the plastic recycling program to its other client municipalities. Eventually, recycling flexible plastic will become the norm nationwide.

We can be pleased it started here, in Pottstown, Pennsylvania.



Commentary by  
Thomas Hylton



**RECYCLING FACILITY** — J.P. Mascaro's 75,000 square foot recycling facility in Exeter Township, which recycles 700 tons of materials a day, has new state-of-the-art equipment that can sort flexible plastic like grocery bags and food pouches for recycling. Pottstown will be the first community served because it already has bins that Mascaro uses for recycling.