



DeKalb County Sanitation Division Director Tracy Hutchinson poses for a photo next to a compressed natural gas (CNG) residential rear-loader collection truck.

DeKalb County's Tracy Hutchinson breaks the proverbial glass ceiling

A move toward empowering women in the solid waste industry

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Escaping the confines of a predominantly male arena continues to be a challenge for many women seeking senior or terminal roles in the solid waste industry. Gender equality

at all levels appears to be progressing at a relatively slow pace. Intangible and undefined obstacles seem to be an integral part of the organizational, structural and cultural barriers to females seeking advancement. A women's

social network continues to challenge the status quo, aimed at finding a voice and empowering women seeking advancement within the industry. In this global environment of a male-dominated industry, DeKalb County, Ga., has been no exception to the elusive role of women at the helm of the County's third-largest operation, the Sanitation Division. Since its inception in 1942, the Division has historically employed only male directors, until DeKalb County Sanitation Division Director Tracy Hutchinson broke the proverbial glass ceiling, becoming the Division's first female director and one of Georgia's few African-American sanitation directors.

The journey to this admirable and historic role has been a long, but progressive, empowering, enlightening and worthwhile one. This carefully crafted path began with Ms. Hutchinson's attainment of a Bachelor of Science degree in Chemical Engineering from Savannah State University. Subsequently, gaining expertise in the areas of environmental assessment, enhancement and compliance, as well as all aspects of solid waste processing, disposal and landfill operations, has resulted in Ms. Hutchinson's successful championing and co-facilitating of waste management initiatives throughout her 20-year industry tenure. Ms. Hutchinson's desire to advance has resulted in professional accomplishments such as serving as corporate director for SWANA North America, the first female African-American president of the SWANA Georgia Chapter, and holding professional certifications in landfill operations, and collection and recycling systems. Throughout her career, Ms. Hutchinson has successfully pioneered and presented innovative solid waste and environmental design ideas, concepts and proposals across all organizational levels, and integrated supporting policies and procedures into existing business models.

Serving as the first African-American female in a senior management role within the engineering department at Waste Management, followed by the role of assistant director with DeKalb County's Sanitation Division in 2004, brought greater visibility to Ms. Hutchinson as an industry pioneer. During her tenure in the latter position, Ms. Hutchinson oversaw the Division's processing and disposal units, implementing innovative operating procedures aimed at achieving the highest levels of operational efficiency. A sustained focus on operational excellence contributed to Ms. Hutchinson's promotion to interim division director in September 2016, moving to permanent status in June 2017.

With a \$69 million budget, four collection lots, three transfer stations and 641 employees servicing over 178,000 households for garbage collection and upward of 80,000 households for recycling collection weekly, serving at the helm of this self-sustaining enterprise fund operation and one of the Southeast's largest sanitation divisions is no small feat. Overall responsibility for maintaining federal and state compliance for the nationally renowned Seminole Road Landfill, the only county-owned landfill in the state of Georgia, requires specialized skills and knowledge that only a seasoned solid waste industry professional such as Ms. Hutchinson would have. Oversight of all aspects of the Division's day-to-day operations, and the continuous development and execution of long-range strategic plans, are also critical parts of Ms. Hutchinson's responsibilities. The hallmark of her tenure has been and continues to be a commitment to a culture of excellence in all aspects of the Division's operations. This commitment is clearly reflected in Division's current mantra: **A Tradition of Efficiency. Accountability. Resilience. Integrity.**

In collaboration with area managers overseeing the personnel, customer service, communications, accounting, and field service operations areas, Ms. Hutchinson's vision, which closely aligns with the Division's overall mission, is unequivocal and integrates the following:

- Provide timely and efficient service to the Division's more than 178,000 customers, with a sustained focus on customer service excellence
- Implement and sustain innovative and viable divisional control policies and procedures, aimed at continually improving operational efficiencies
- Continually deliver the Division's messaging to diverse audiences and stakeholders with confidence, conviction, professionalism, clarity and purpose

Through this collaborative and visionary approach, the Division's contemporary business model provides one of the region's most comprehensive and integrated solid waste management programs for residential and commercial customers, and integrates the following priorities:

- **Expanding environmental sustainability efforts** – recycling-related initiatives such as the historic countywide glass recycling program implementation; an exclusive and customized recycling program partnership with the DeKalb County School District; streamlining the recycling preparation and collection process through innovative operational changes; expanding the alternative use of methane gas, including the compressed natural gas program.
- **Equipment enhancement** – revolutionary changes in the garbage and recycling collection process,

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with the introduction of fully-automated collection trucks in fall 2018; move toward a 100 percent compressed natural gas vehicle fleet.

- **Streamlining customer service call center operations** – a significant increase in staffing resources, an increased focus on customer service representative training, and a more efficient reporting structure, complemented by innovative changes in call center operations policies and procedures.
- **Enhancing community partnerships** – providing resources and support for events hosted by cities and community organizations; maintaining progressive and mutually beneficial relationships with community partners and DeKalb agencies.
- **Enhancing employee resources/empowerment** – a sustained focus on employee training, empowerment and professional development.
- **Staffing** – ensuring optimal levels of staffing resources at all times, aimed at serving DeKalb residents in a timely and efficient manner.

The Division is poised to meet the challenges and growth of an ever-increasing customer base, as well as the focus on environmental stewardship efforts. Ms. Hutchinson's versatile visionary approach seeks to improve the existing business operations model through the continuous review, analysis and introduction of innovative industry-related procedures that align with the Division's existing business model. This approach will be instrumental in streamlining future sanitation collection processes, aimed at providing an integrated and sustainable business operations model.

Serving as mom to 13-year-old Kennedy Hutchinson and maintaining an active membership in the elite Alpha Kappa

Alpha sorority provide a welcome reprieve from her daily responsibilities at the Sanitation Division. Ms. Hutchinson's professional and personal accomplishments have not gone unnoticed within the DeKalb community, receiving the honor of the Hidden Figures of DeKalb Women's Award in March 2017. There are many to thank who have truly made a difference in her life, and given her the hope and encouragement to persevere. With deepest affection and eternal gratitude, Ms. Hutchinson thanks her mother, aunts and late grandmother and great-grandmother, who all laid the foundation for her dream of making it to the top.

Approaching her responsibilities with uncommon grace, unparalleled professionalism, resilience, resolve, brilliance and a collaborative approach makes Ms. Hutchinson one of the industry's premier female solid waste professionals. In a personal reflection, Ms. Hutchinson states: "I believe that women are natural connectors, collaborators, mentors, nurturers, leaders, colleagues, global citizens, inspirational, and have the stamina, resolve and resilience to always work toward the common good. My approach to running the DeKalb County Sanitation Division is reflected in my ability to design an efficient, cost-effective, integrated and sustainable business model. Improving the quality of life for every DeKalb County resident and bridging the gap between operational inefficiencies and operational excellence will continue to be a critical element of my goal to raise the Division's profile. By leveraging strategic alliances and a collaborative approach, and through teamwork and sacrifice, I encourage others to join me in my personal crusade to empower women within the solid waste industry."

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