

ThisWeek
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Leaf collecting easier thanks to Upper Arlington's upgraded equipment

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Upper Arlington crews responsible for removing fallen leaves each autumn are benefiting from the city's efforts to upgrade equipment.

By next fall, all six frontline leaf-collection machines used by the Upper Arlington Public Service Department will feature hydraulic arms controlled by a crew member operating a joystick.

The city has five Dinkmar Leaf Masters. Adding the fifth one this year means the department has to use only one of the old leaf-collection machines that have to be operated manually.

Next year, two of the manual machines will be kept as backup options, but department workers largely won't have to wrestle with the bulky equipment that employees said takes its toll on backs and shoulders when they're used to pick up 1,400 to 1,500 loads of leaves each autumn.

"Just from a physically demanding standpoint, you're riding on a seat and you're controlling it with a joystick," said Jeff Erdy, an Upper Arlington Public Service worker.

"The other machines, you're walking alongside the machine," he said. "(The newer equipment) will raise and lower hydraulically and will swing left and right. The old machine has a handle on it and you're pushing a button and physically moving it up and down, back and forth."

The city bought its first Leaf Master in 2016. It added two in both 2017 and 2019.

The machines cost approximately \$59,000 each and are expected to last about 10 years, according to Tom Nutini, public service manager. They're used six days a week, 10 hours per day, for about eight weeks a year.

Nutini said crews collect enough leaves to cover a football field from end zone to end zone in a 10-foot high stack.

“We can reach much further with the hydraulic machine than with the manual machine,” Nutini said. “So there is some benefit to residents there.”

In central Ohio, New Albany, Pickerington, Westerville, Whitehall and Worthington also use the machines.

“I don’t anybody uses those machines in the capacity that we do,” said Katy Rees, public service performance analyst. “Nobody picks up the amount of leaves we pick up. “I say that because of the amount of trees and because Upper Arlington, we’re 10 square miles and almost every inch of that is residential. Also, (other communities) don’t pick up on every street. We’re almost fully residential, and we pick up on every street in Upper Arlington.”

Rees didn’t have information about the number of injuries Public Service workers experienced with the old machines versus the new, but did say she’s noticed less fatigue and use of sick time among the staff since the use of Leaf Masters began.

The newer machines enable her department to be more efficient, which she said is important because the city uses the same trucks to collect leaves as it does to remove snow and ice.

“Using the manual collection machines can be a very physically demanding job as it requires a constant repetitive sweeping motion, which can be very taxing, especially on the shoulders and the upper back,” Rees said. “In order to pick all the leaves up in the time frame that we have – before it starts to snow – we need to have full crews for the full eight weeks of collection.

“By using the hydraulic collection arm, collection efforts are more efficient and, while it is still a tough job, there is less physical demand on the staff.”

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