



## WEB ONLY: Mike Mahar Q&A

**By Aaron Besecker**  
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— PORTER — A Niagara County native now stands at the helm of the Northeast's only hazardous waste facility.

Michael Mahar, a Wilson resident and a former project manager with Niagara Falls' Severson Environmental Services, was recently named district manager at CWM Chemical Services. Mahar replaces Richard Sturges, who has been promoted and is now in charge of Waste Management's upstate New York operations.

Mahar recently agreed to sit down with the Niagara Gazette and discuss his thoughts on his new job and how his company is viewed in the community.

QUESTION: What are you responsible for as district manager?

ANSWER: I'm basically responsible for the safety of the workers at the site, environmental compliance of the site and also the financial performance of the site. Those are the three key things that I'm responsible for.

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Q: How did you get into the field of environmental engineering and hazardous waste?

A: When I graduated from Clarkson University — the president of Severson (Environmental Services) Michael Elia lives in Wilson — and he inquired with me about going to work for them. And one thing led to another and I ended up starting with them, stayed there for 10 years.

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Q: Can you tell me a little bit about what you did at Severson?

A: I worked in their engineering and project management department. I managed projects as a project manager. Actually I did nothing but out of town projects except for one of them in 10 years. One project I worked on at was Pfohl Brothers Landfill near the Buffalo (Niagara International) Airport, I think it was for a couple of years.

I was basically responsible for going out to the field and managing the project from the field location. If you look at my resume, I did projects in Massena; Cranston, R.I.; Lima, Ohio; New Bedford, Mass. The only one not on there, I worked at Alcoa in Massena in 2005.

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Q: It looks like all of these are pretty big projects.

A: Very large. Huge. I was usually involved in ... some of their more involved projects when I was there.

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Q: What do you take, practically speaking, from that job to this job?

A: If you look at the chain, Severson does work on site, remediating the sites. In other words, let's say there's contamination in a waterway, in a river. They'll remove the contamination and then they ship it somewhere.

So I basically moved one step down the chain. I was at the remediation sites before and now I moved

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here to one of the facilities. It's basically the same industry, I've just moved down one step on the chain.

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Q: What do you think about the way that some parts of the community perceive CWM?

A: There's supporters and then there's opposers, obviously. It seems like the opposers, they're loud and it seems that they get heard more than the supporters do. I can tell you, from our open house we had this past year, we sent out little cards for them to fill out about their experience here, and would they support us or wouldn't they.

I think out of the 400 or 500 people at the open house, 42 percent of the people sent back the cards, which I thought was interesting. Because when I get stuff like that at home, I don't know about you, but I don't have time for it and I usually just throw it in the recycling bin.

I thought it was interesting that 42 percent took the time to fill them out. And of those 42 percent, 86 percent of those people said they would support the facility.

In my opinion ... this is America, you can oppose the site. You can have your feelings about anything. If you're going to oppose the site, at least you could come here and really learn about what we do here. A few of the people that are the leading opposers of the site, they've never even been here.

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Q: What do you think the biggest misconception is about what goes on here?

A: It's probably the health risks. I've had, now I'm 11 years in the hazardous waste industry. I can tell you I haven't been involved in a site that's more monitored than this site from an environmental standpoint.

We take thousands of groundwater samples from over 300 wells around the site to monitor the groundwater.

We do surface water sampling at six locations and we have air monitoring stations surrounding the site. And that's not any different from when I worked for Severson. There was monitoring that went on at everyone of those sites while we were remediating them.

We have a permit that we have to comply with. If we weren't complying with it we wouldn't be able to operate.

From a health standpoint, I think we're doing the right things to make sure that employees, our customers are safe and the community is safe.

It all comes down to monitoring and the controls we have in place.

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Q: Dick Sturges, who was the former district manager, has been promoted but is still here. Can you tell me what his new role entails.

A: He is the director of post collection operations for the upstate New York market area for (parent company) Waste Management. Post collection is basically landfills and transfer stations. He's involved in both municipal solid waste and this hazardous waste facility.

He is still retaining the title of senior district manager here, advising me, you know when issues come up on what to do. I'll talk to him on a daily basis, chat about things, decide what to do.

That's his role. That's what he's been elevated too. He's still involved here but he's getting more involved in Waste Management's overall operations.

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Q: What are your goals for your new position here?

A: Basically to continue to run a compliant facility that provides a needed service for a convenient society. Basically to continue to run a compliant facility, that's our number one goal here. Safety of the workers and whatnot.

Michael Mahar

n AGE: 36

n BORN: Lewiston

n RESIDES: Wilson

n EDUCATION: B.S. in civil and environmental engineering, M.B.A. from Clarkson University

n EXPERIENCE: Project manager at Severson Environmental Services for 10 years; promoted from operations manager to district manager at CWM Chemical Services in October

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#### Photos



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