

Glendale Heights municipal employee Rocco Barbanente painted the flag drop box.

—RICHARD A. CHAPMAN/SUN-TIMES PHOTOS

Old Glory has faded: now what?

Suburb residents can have their banners properly disposed

BY DAN ROZEK
Staff Reporter

In a surge of patriotism after the Sept. 11 terror attacks, Glendale Heights handed out more than 10,000 small American flags to its residents — one flag for every home in the western suburb.

Now, more than two years later, village officials have hatched an innovative way for residents to properly dispose of any aging, tattered flags that are no longer fit to be flown.

Local leaders converted a mailbox outside village hall into a drive-up, dropoff box where residents can leave torn, ripped and faded American flags. The deteriorating flags are being passed on to

a local veterans group, which plans to periodically burn them in accordance with military guidelines.

The red, white and blue mailbox, also decorated with a flag, military insignia and an American eagle, should make it easier for local residents to respectfully dispose of their flags, something that's difficult for them to do individually. Many people aren't even aware of how flags are supposed to be destroyed, officials said.

"People just don't know what to do with them," said Glendale Heights Village President Linda Jackson said. "We gave them an opportunity to dispose of their flags properly."

The idea, suggested by Trustee Chester Pojack, has taken off since

the mailbox, located outside village hall at 300 Civic Center Plaza, was formally dedicated on Veterans Day.

The new dropoff box is collecting about a flag a day. On Wednesday, the box contained 30 flags dropped off this month. Pojack added a 31st he had just picked up at the Glendale Heights Post Office, which donated an old mailbox to the village for the program.

Since word of the dropoff point began spreading, Pojack and other village officials said they've received calls and flags from throughout the Chicago area.

"They feel they need to dispose of them properly, they just want to do the right thing," said village spokeswoman Gina Thorson.

Pojack said he recently received two worn-out flags in the mail from a Chicago woman who asked him to see that they were respectfully destroyed.

"It's working out just great. It makes me feel good," said Pojack, who flies the flag daily as his home and said the idea for a dropbox "just came to me."

A local veterans group that has agreed to take the tattered flags and periodically destroy them likes the idea of the dropoff point, with one official saying it should help ensure flags are treated respectfully by giving residents a single place to take them for disposal.

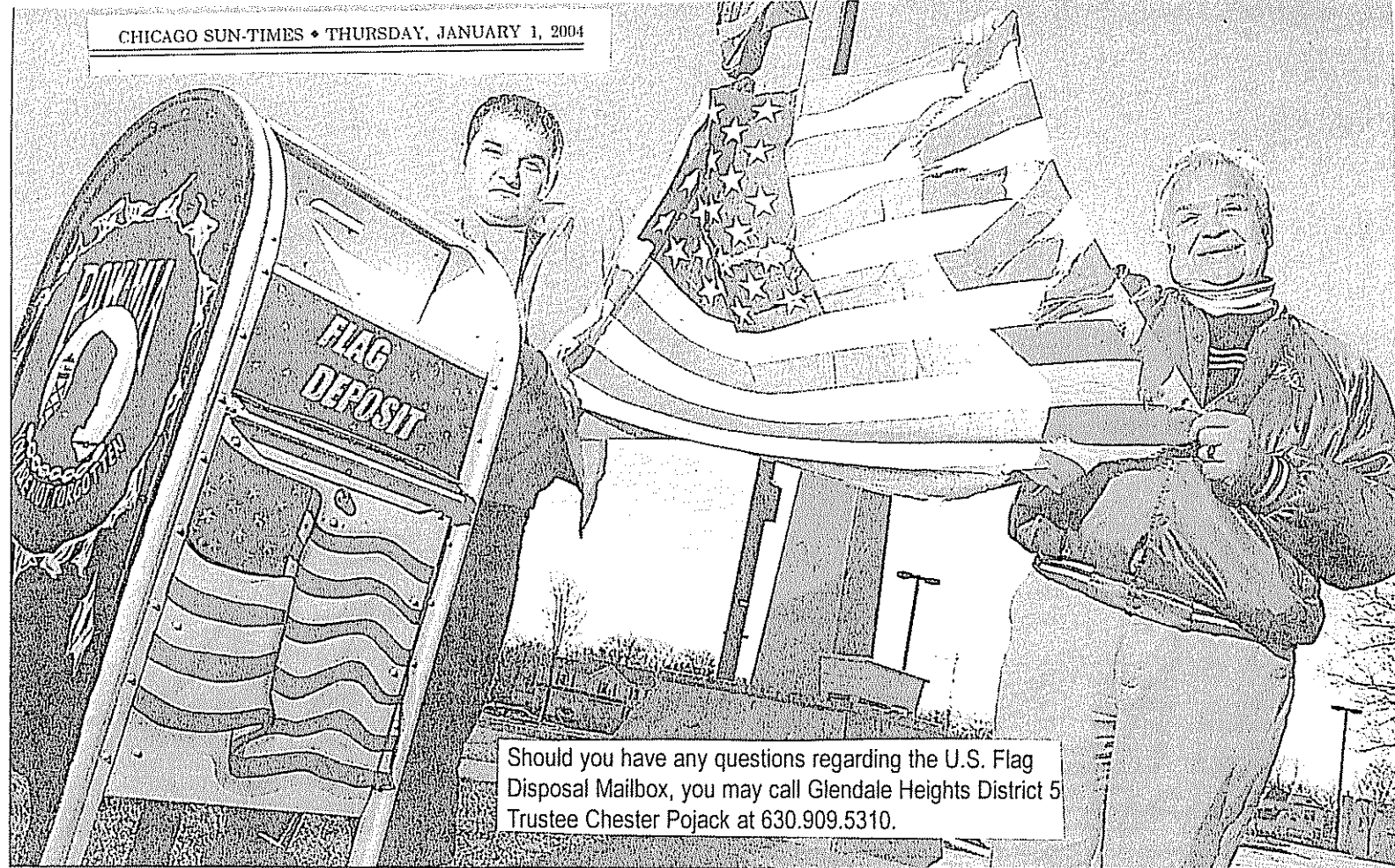
"It just makes more sense and works better," said Arnie Cerny, commander of the Veterans of

Foreign Wars Post 2377.

The VFW post in the past has taken aging flags it has received to a rural site in Kendall County, where a brief ceremony is held and the banners then are burned. Glendale Heights, like most other villages in the area, doesn't allow open, outdoor burning, which technically makes it illegal for residents to destroy flags by burning them on their own.

But with the new flag dropoff program, the village likely will grant the veterans' group a waiver so it can destroy the flags locally.

"We will make special arrangements with the VFW and the fire department so they can have a proper disposal of the flags," Jackson said.



Rocco Barbanente (left) and Chester Pojack hold a tattered flag next to the Glendale Heights flag deposit box.