



## **The Litter King of Lincoln**

By Kenny Miller

**LINCOLN**—It's the sound of a leaf blower breaks the stillness of a dark night in the North 27<sup>th</sup> Wal-Mart parking lot that let's you know Mel Harding, 49, is on the job and windrowing discarded cups, plastic shopping bags and other stuff that people just don't have the time to throw away properly. That's why stores like Wal-Mart hire Lincoln's Cleanrite company and they send out their King of Littler.

This robust, scruffy looking masked man of the night is very organized in his fight against litterbugs. First, he uses his backpack blower to blow the trash away from the curbs and from under cars out into the driving lanes. After the garbage is in the lanes, he gets into his special vacuum truck which has rotating brushes he controls from inside the cab. It's showtime.

Mel zigs and zags, does quick u-turns, and races around cart stands as he searches for discarded trash in an early morning ballet of parking lot Pac-Man. His tips aren't bad either. "I see a lot of change lying around but I don't stop for pennies," Mel explained. They get sucked up just as easily as an old fast food straw.

His truck seems small for the big job of pickup up most of Lincoln's big mall parking lot trash. "Actually, it holds a lot," Mel explained. "The trash is sprayed with water and compacted so we really can pick up a ton of stuff." When the truck is full, he dumps

it into a roll-off container and the blight of Lincoln's night ends up in the Lincoln landfill.

Is money the most unusual thing he finds on his early morning sweep of the Capitol City? "Well, it's kind of disgusting to talk about it but the most unusual thing I see are used condoms," he said. He let the security folks at Gateway know so they could keep an eye out.

Mel has to keep an eye out for obstructions and cars. "That dent is not mine," he said as he pointed to a big dent in the machine behind the cab. "Another guy ran into a concrete beam in a parking lot." So far, Mel is damage free even though he roars around Lincoln parking lots that only a Nintendo Gameboy(r) fan could dream about.

"I like working nights," Mel said as he outlined his experience in the delivery business. "I like the freedom and like being my own boss," he said. He found this job with the help of Nebraska Job Service and he likes his job as Lincoln's King of Litter. But make no mistake about it, even though he has as job because of litterbugs, he is no fan of them.

"People are very inconsiderate," he explained. "Sometimes they come out on their breaks and toss junk right where I have just been." Mel remembers the tearful Indian in the canoe which lead the anti-littering campaign back in a more environmentally concerned time. "Some people are slobs," he said.

Even though his job depends on people who litter, you can bet his four year old daughter won't be one of them. No doubt there will be some serious trash talk in the Harding house before she ever learns how to roll down a window and throw something out. And you can take that to the dump.