

## Meet the crew who cleans up the Passaic River

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Meet the caretakers of the Passaic River 

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**NORTH ARLINGTON** -- You could view them as the trash collectors of the Passaic River. But George Krusznis and Bob O'Neill see themselves more as caretakers, helping to heal a sick waterway.

The two are part of an 11-member crew of the Passaic Valley Sewerage Commission's skimmer vessel Newark Bay. They collect the trash floating near the surface.

It's no secret the Passaic River is among the most polluted bodies of water in the United States. Two centuries of industrial dumping is buried in layers of silt and muck at the bottom of the river. While the river faces one of the most challenging and expensive environmental cleanups in U.S. history to remove chemicals, pesticides and heavy metals at the bottom, these men from the commission believe they can make a difference at the top.

The vessel travels up and down the lower Passaic collecting debris and trash using a conveyor belt on the front of the vessel. The materials travel up the conveyor and are then collected and stored onboard until offloaded at a dock in North Arlington.

The skimmer collects an average of 40,000 pounds of trash per month, Kruznis said. Anything from bottles, cans, shoes, trees stumps, clothing, furniture. You name it and they've pulled it from the river. And there's always more to collect since each new tide brings new trash.

"In a perfect world on this river I would like to see it used much more extensively," Kruznis, said. "I don't think we'll get swimmers -- not in our lifetime."

Krusznis wishes that people would learn to stop using the Passaic as a trash can. He thinks the key to slowing the flow of garbage is to reach and educate our children early on before they learn bad habits.

While some might think it's a losing battle, he said he can't imagine what the river would look like if they didn't do the work they do.

"Seeing this river clean up is great because we're a part of it," O'Neill said. "Every day we come out here and we see some progress."