

Reporter gets first-hand account of dirt-moving experience



By Jeanette Kendall

A lone truck driver drives his rig across the route at the Downtown 2010 property.

Photos



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East Peoria, Ill. -

Semi trucks came and went along East Washington Street Thursday.

The sight is nothing new for those located along Washington Street as the convoy of semis drives from the Downtown 2010 site to Cole Street and back for 10 hours a day, six days a week.

Now in its third week, the drive is monotonous for Denny Reynolds, who owns D Reynolds Trucking in Peoria.

Reynolds is one of many independent truckers hauling dirt from along Cole Street to the Downtown 2010 site to level the 68 acres in preparation for development.

As Reynolds pulled out from the downtown site onto Washington Street, he said the truckers do 30 rounds in 10 hours without taking a lunch.

"Yes, (it gets monotonous). Round and round and round we go," Reynolds said. "It's just eat on the run. You got plenty of time," he said.

As the truck bounced along on the road, Reynolds shifted gears. He said all of the truckers on the job know each other and got the work through Bob Kennel Trucking of Metamora.

Driving down Cole Street, Reynolds paused behind one lone car parked on the side of the road so an

oncoming semi could get by. Later, a trucker on the CB complained about the car.

Besides the vehicle that caused the drivers some inconvenience, Reynolds said the operation has been smooth.

"The drivers are on a steady pace. Stark (Excavating) has control at both ends. It's their operator up here (on Cole) and labor down there (at the downtown site)," Reynolds said.

As Reynolds turned left into an area piled with dirt, he said each round takes the drivers about 20 minutes.

With no air conditioning in the truck's cab, dust entered the open window. Dust is something the workers are likely used to by now, and Reynolds is no stranger to the pros and cons of the trucking business.

"I unloaded the boat from Moses," he joked, adding that he has been driving a truck for 34 years. Reynolds rounded a U-shaped path in the mud to wait in line for his dirt load. As Casey Debolt dumped each of the three loads into the back of the truck bed, it jolted a bit. Then, it was down a small incline and back onto Cole Street.

Each truck can carry only so much weight, and Reynolds said some of the truckers were checked randomly that day by engineers and the East Peoria Police Department. The legal limit is 78,000 pounds. Reynolds said each truck carries about 70,000 pounds of dirt in each load.

Nearing the end of Cole Street, Reynolds said to help the truckers get onto Washington Street in a timely fashion, city officials erected a new temporary traffic light there.

When asked how he kept from being bored during the 10-hour day of driving back and forth, Reynolds said he listens to the radio or talks to the other truckers on the CB.

"We just find things to talk about," he said.

One thing the truck drivers may or may not have discussed is the historical significance of the dirt they are hauling.

The 130-year-old dirt was dug to make way for the Manhattan Mine in East Peoria, one of the biggest in the state.

Cullinan spokesman Mike Smothers called attention to the irony of the situation.

"The dirt that once was at the base of the city's first economic center will be at the base of its latest one," he said.

East Peoria city officials purchased 125,000 cubic yards of dirt from Mike Sutherland at a cost of \$156,250.

Scott Rakers, superintendent for Stark Excavating, said they will pile the dirt and clay mix 4 feet high onto 129,845 square yards of land, or most of the 66-acre vacant downtown site. This would equate to covering a football field 11 stories high.

Smothers said the dirt is being compacted where steel pilings will be placed for structures, such as the new city hall and library.

An event to kick off the development of the city's new downtown, which will contain a mix of "community, commerce and technology," is set for Sept. 3 at the site.