

Mayor, City Council honor Litter Lifters

April declared Litter Lifter Appreciation Month

By Cyndy Hardy
LARSON NEWSPAPERS

John Sturgis, in his first sweep of a 1.5-mile section from I-17 to Red Tank Draw late last year, reported that he picked up one sleeping bag, two hubcaps, 53 pounds of assorted trash, 85 glass bottles and 188 aluminum cans.

Some reports say that Budweiser is the beer of choice.

Sturgis is one of about 150 volunteers who don safety vests and wield trash grabbers to keep Sedona beautiful.

The Litter Lifters will forever more be celebrated each April, now known as Litter Lifter Appreciation Month and Litter Prevention Month, by proclamation of Sedona Mayor Pud Colquitt and the Sedona City Council.

"It's not a glam job," said Barbara Zeschke, chairwoman

Get Involved

The Litter Lifters have been busting trash in Greater Sedona since 1971.

They have received eight awards since 1994.

The Sedona City Council recognized the volunteers on March 22 with a proclamation that every April will be Litter Lifter Appreciation Month and Litter Prevention Month.

For more information, or to volunteer, call chairwoman Barbara Zeschke at 282-4938.

of the group.

"The cigarette butts are killers," she said, "the diapers are foul."

Some other items Zeschke said they've found include thong underwear, condoms, refrigerators and box springs that people have dropped off in the forest.

She said a certain ditch near Sedona Red Rock High School produces pipes and other paraphernalia.

For Zeschke, picking up other people's trash has been almost a lifelong endeavor.

"My mother used to always have gum and Kleenex around,"



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BARBARA ZESCHKE, chairwoman of Keep Sedona Beautiful's Litter Lifters, coordinates the schedules, training and supplies for the many volunteers who walk the talk to keep trash off the streets of Greater Sedona.

said Zeschke.

"Remember those little triangle windows they used to put on cars?" she asked. Her mother was more inclined to use

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them than the trash receptacle, Zeschke said.

Even when her mother was 87 years old, Zeschke said, she had to watch carefully because, after opening the passenger door, her mother would toss the Kleenex under the car while Zeschke got in the other side.

"Once, I made her get out and pick it up," she said.

With almost 30 years of litter-busting behind her, and the reputation that goes with it, Zeschke said she'd be "burned at the stake" if someone saw her mother litter while they were together.

She was involved with the first recycle center in the south

suburbs of Chicago in 1975, Zeschke said.

Zeschke has been bashing trash in Sedona since about 1987, she said, when the team was just herself, another couple and the "town drunk."

Zeschke credits local businesses for donating bags and vests and for letting the Litter Lifters use their dumpsters to deposit the trash, which is picked up year-round from about 140 miles of road in the Verde Valley.

Some businesses have tried to adopt stretches of highway but Zeschke has held firm to her territory.

They resist commercial adoption because the businesses want to put up signs that, according to

Zeschke, provide free advertising but add clutter to the roads.

She insists that, although the Litter Lifters operate under the umbrella of Keep Sedona Beautiful, there are no politics involved in their efforts.

Litter Lifter volunteers come from all walks of life, according to Zeschke.

Volunteers come and go as they move out of town, become physically unable to make their assigned routes or pass away, she said.

The Litter Lifters welcome all new volunteers, she said, even the ones sent her way by the Yavapai County court system to do community service.

New recruits are trained in matters of safety and hazardous

materials, Zeschke said.

They are also insured, another benefit of operating under the KSB umbrella, she said.

The only other likely compensation might be change found along the road.

"Valuables, we take to the KSB office," said Zeschke.

The age 70 lurks around a corner for Zeschke.

Her knees aren't what they used to be.

But she and her husband still enjoy tearing up a dance floor now and then, she said, perhaps another benefit of the walking, bending and lifting she does as a volunteer.

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