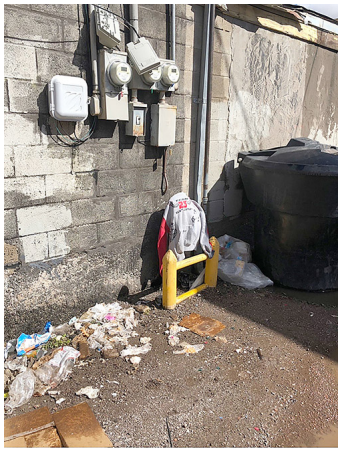




‘A CLEAN GALLUP’ aims to beautify the city

With the proliferation of disposable items like empty bottles and plastic bags, it’s easy for litter and garbage to pile up. One group of Gallup citizens is looking for ways to do their part and reduce that load, through community involvement and organized pick-up events.

The Facebook group “A Clean Gallup” is currently 1,300 members strong. Labor Persinger, who has lived in Gallup for 25 years, created the page as a way to combat what he sees as a litter problem in the city.

The group formed after an art show, when those involved went out and picked up trash in an effort to turn into art.

“We found that a lot of the trash was actually trash,” Persinger said. “We weren’t really able to make as much art as we were thinking.”

Persinger said that experience opened his eyes to the scale of the trash problem in Gallup.

While Persinger’s group is focused on finding solutions locally, statistics show excessive trash is an issue nationwide: According to a 2013 study by the Enviornmental Protection Agency, the average person produces about 4.4 pounds of garbage per day.

The EPA also found that, in 2013 alone, Americans produced 254 million tons of garbage.

BEAUTIFYING THE CITY

Persinger attended a trash and recycling community training that the City of Gallup hosted April 3 downtown, which involved around 650 different communities.

He said Gallup is now a Keep America Beautiful affiliate, which is a national organization that promotes community education and hands-on stewardship in an effort to decrease litter.

Keep America Beautiful aims to increase recycling, encourage grassroots volunteerism, and make sustainable improvement achievable for communities of all sizes.

In that same spirit of community involvement, Persinger is currently organizing an Earth Day

cleanup event planned for April 22 with A Clean Gallup. This year, they expect there will be about 200 to 300 members to help.

The City of Gallup is supportive of the event, and will provide gloves, trash bags, safety equipment, and other clean-up materials to organizers.

AFFECTED AREAS

Along with streets and parks, the areas around businesses like Walmart, Home Depot, Safeway, and Albertsons are sites where trash and litter pile up, Persinger said.

Persinger pointed to trash bags and empty liquor bottles as the main source of litter around businesses.

He said that the group's intention is not to tell people what to do. Rather, "A Clean Gallup" aims to raise awareness of their cause, and offer avenues for the community to join in.

Persinger does worry that if the trash issue goes unchecked, "we are encouraging bigger issues, such as vandalism."

If the community fails to take action or responsibility for keeping its city clean, Persinger said, vandals might think that the community does not care.

According to statistics from Recycle Across America and the EPA, Americans discard "21.9 billion plastic bottles, 28 billion glass jars and bottles, 26 billion pounds of clothing and textiles, (and) 35 million tons of food" each year.

Based on these numbers, Persinger encourages the community of Gallup and as well as the

Navajo Nation to recycle. He suggests reusing bags for storage, choosing paper bags over plastic, eliminating plastic straws, using a reusable water bottle, and trying to keep the area clean around where you live.

“If you see a problem, be proactive about it,” he said. “Be the change you want to be. Maintain (the land’s) beauty. If you’re making trash, at least be accountable.”

LOOKING FORWARD

Persinger said when he first started A Clean Gallup it was exhausting.

Even though the group is volunteer-run, there was neither the funding nor the budget to do what needed to be done. He asked church groups and other organizations to assist and increase awareness.

“Yes, Gallup has a serious trash problem,” Persinger said of his attitude starting the group. “How can we fix it?”

Since then, there has been outreach from the Gallup Business Improvement District, the Gallup MainStreet Arts & Cultural District, the Gallup-McKinley County Chamber of Commerce, and the private sector to assist A Clean Gallup.

“It’s a long term problem, not a quick fix,” Persinger said. “We live in the desert, so trash that is left there for years, is still there, it’s just buried in dirt.”

Earth Day is April 22. The trash pick-up event with A Clean Gallup begins at 11 am, with volunteers meeting at Wowie’s Event Center.

For more information, please call Labor Persinger at (505) 409-1779.

By Boderra Joe
Sun Correspondent