

## “Lessons Learned From Cleanup Efforts”

As we learned from the recent litter research efforts – taxpayers in Iowa spend \$13.5 million to clean up litter and debris. Of that figure, less than \$300,000 was spent on education or enforcement – the true prevention efforts that help change the basic behavior patterns of people.

Normally cleanup efforts are not preventive – they are simply reactive. In other words, they do not specifically provide opportunities or approaches to educate those involved. We tend to view cleanup efforts as “janitorial” efforts without really impacting the reduction of future littering.

One basic element of cleanup efforts does, however, have a key level of education that helps change future behavior patterns. When you get your hands dirty picking up what someone else has thrown away, that can leave a strong negative impression about those who threw the litter away. That attitude toward those who litter results in a changed behavior by those doing the cleanup not to litter and to discourage others.

During a recent KIB-sponsored cleanup event around the State Capitol, 80 bags of litter were picked up from both adjacent areas and the Capitol grounds. Two of the individuals – John & Judy Schneller – became more resentful, the longer we cleaned up. They developed strong feelings about those who litter. The feeling became so strong that sometime after the event John gave me a call and said – “I’ll give \$2,000 to any officer who tickets those who are littering!” It is not appropriate to pay officers to write tickets so we discussed some other options.

It was from this incident that the LITTER ENFORCEMENT AWARD program was developed. The allocation of two \$1,000 awards to those enforcement officers in Iowa who take extra efforts to “prevent” littering was developed. And the first of the two awards (based on a nomination process) went to two people in Muscatine who developed a strong downtown anti-litter program and ordinance (largely on their own time) – Lavene Payne and Debbie Yerington.



Debbie Yerrington, Gerry Schnepf, Mayor Dick O'Brien and Lavene Payne at the presentation of the \$1,000 check to the City of Muscatine on behalf of the two award winners at the Muscatine City Council meeting on November 20, 2003.

The other award went to the Denison Highway Patrol Post for litter prevention efforts in Denison and on the adjacent highways.



Executive Director of KIB, representatives of the Denison Chamber of Commerce and Highway Patrol officers and staff.

In both instances, the individuals did not receive the cash – they received a certificate of appreciation and the right to allocate the dollars (in their name) to a beautification

project. Both award winners allocated the dollars to local beautification efforts in their communities. The program recognizes the extra efforts of individuals and provides a reward that benefits the community. A great outcome and educational experience from a cleanup project.

To obtain additional information on the enforcement award, please check the web page under the “grants” segment for the criteria and process for submission of a candidate, or contact Keep Iowa Beautiful:

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See you in the next column.

*Helping to Keep Iowa Beautiful*

Gerald F. Schnepf, Executive Director