

Adopt-A-Highway News

Ohio Department of Transportation

Ohio's First



Local Students Spread the Word to Help Keep Ohio Beautiful



Two classes at Harmon Middle School in Pickerington, Ohio were given the opportunity to create designs to be used on ODOT anti-litter postcards. The students who submitted designs are in Mrs. Bowen's and Mrs. Dryer's fifth grade classes and were very excited about getting their drawings selected. The postcards will be printed in the Spring and distributed at all Adopt-a-Highway events and the Ohio State Fair. Pictured (l-r) are Eyad Hussein, Ali Murphy, Jessica Motz, Ashley Hull, Caleb Winner, Alexa Strejeck, and Christina Wentz.

For a current list of Adopt-A-Highway Coordinators visit our Web site at: <http://www.dot.state.oh.us/maintadmin/aah.htm> or call Scott Lucas, State Coordinator at (614)- 644-6603

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About four times a year, 30 to 40 boys roll up their sleeves and dig in to the trash alongside a two-mile stretch of State Route 219. The Coldwater Columbian Squires, a youth chapter of the Knights of Columbus for boys ages 12 to 18, were the first group in Ohio to adopt a highway over 15 years ago. The group does many philanthropic activities throughout their community and had been cleaning up around Coldwater for years; the Adopt-A-Highway program would be a chance for the boys to be officially recognized for their hard work.



Mrs. Gels. "It makes you feel good about yourself and your community."

Mr. Gels thinks this program would even be good for senior citizens because it would provide them a chance to be involved with their community, be out in the sunshine and get a little exercise. "I do believe it's something to be proud of; the kids are taking a leading part in this important program," said Mr. Gels.

drive through because they felt it was important to maintain their neighborhood," said Heather Hall, the Columbus Blue Jackets Community Development Manager.

On April 29, 2004 the group of nearly 100 people started the day by painting over the graffiti under the High Street bridge on Convention Center Drive. Afterward they went to Goodale Park and picked up litter and mulched. To end the day the group went to clean up more specific parts of the Arena District including Neil and Goodale Streets.

Prior to cleaning up, the Ohio Department of Transportation and the Ohio Department of Natural Resources held a kick off in Nationwide Arena at 1 p.m. ODOT brought their show mobile, a large truck that plays music and has a stage, and ODNR passed out informational pamphlets and offered their support.



"This is a win, win, win situation because it shows the teams community involvement; because a big name supported our program; and because

Joe Howell, District 7 Roadside Improvements Supervisor, was in charge of finding a group to pilot the program 15 years ago and knew exactly who to ask – Janet Gels, the litter and recycling director for Mercer County. Gels didn't hesitate in suggesting the Coldwater Columbian Squire boys for the job. Gel's husband, Ralph Gels, is the counselor of the organization and agreed that it would be a great opportunity.

"It (Adopt-A-Highway) teaches kids awareness of litter and that they are the keepers of the environment, and it is therefore their responsibility to keep it clean," said Mr. Gels. The group cleans their stretch of highway about four times a year, but if it gets bad quickly they don't hesitate to go back out and clean again. "We don't take the boys out there just for a leisurely stroll," said Mr. Gels.

Although the group of boys changes from year to year, the Coldwater Columbian Squires, along with Mr. Gels, have now cleaned SR 219 over 60 times. Recently, the group reached "15 year gold star group" status, an honor received after 15 years of service with the Adopt-A-Highway program awarded by the Ohio Department of Transportation. The Gels also have a second stretch of highway adopted under the name of the adult care facility they run, the Gels Home. Mrs. Gels would suggest this experience to anyone looking for an opportunity to help out their community. "It's such a feel good thing to do," said

Keep Columbus Beautiful with the Blue Jackets and the Destroyers



Players, staff, and personnel of the Columbus Blue Jackets and the Columbus Destroyers worked with Keep Columbus Beautiful in conducting a three-part clean up in Columbus.

"The teams really wanted to target the areas that fans and Arena District guests

the community benefited as a result of their efforts," said Mike Pickard, coordinator for Keep Columbus Beautiful. Both teams feel it is important to be involved in their community. "The players understand the importance of showing pride for the area where they work and they love playing in Columbus," said Hall.

Roadside Makes Perfect Proposal

While many people would consider cleaning trash along the roadside unromantic, Robert Smith, a 31 year-old Huntington employee, saw it as a chance to create the "perfect proposal" for then-girlfriend and co-worker Suzanne Comrie, 27, of Elyria. Last fall, Smith enlisted the help of The Learning Channel's (TLC) "Perfect Proposal" and the Ohio Department of Transportation's Adopt-A-Highway Program to create an elaborate wedding proposal.

After waiting for months to find out if he had been chosen for the television program, Smith heard back from TLC and they agreed to help him plan the big surprise. BANYAN Productions, in Philadelphia, contacted Kristine Adams-Wolfe, the Adopt-A-Highway district program manager in central Ohio for ODOT, in August and requested her assistance in preparing an elaborate proposal scheme for national television.

The group adopting the highway was to be from Comrie and Smith's place of employment, Huntington National Bank, in Columbus. The group that Huntington put together were friends with Comrie and in on the plan. They knew that the day after they picked along the roadside that Smith would be proposing in person and via 48 by 15-foot billboard. When the six women began to pick up the litter along U.S. Route 40 Comrie was surprised to see a spokeswoman from ODOT and a cameraman show up. The spokeswoman, however, was not an ODOT employee but Nikki Boyer, the host of TLC's Perfect Proposal and Smiths accomplice.

Boyer let the women in the group know ahead of time that at the end of the day she was going to choose one of them to unveil a billboard to announce Huntington's sponsorship of the Adopt-A-Highway program. She chose the presenter by seeing who collected the most trash, and of course Comrie's co-workers chipped in some of their trash to Comrie's bag to be sure that she received the honor. The next day Comrie met up with Boyer to unveil the new billboard. There was a red carpet leading up to the billboard and

a camera crew. As Comrie pulled a string to reveal it she was truly shocked and cried out "Bobby!"

On the billboard was a picture of her, smiling, and Smith down on one knee with a ring with huge lettering behind him saying "Will you marry me?" "I was truly shocked, I had no idea," Comrie said. "It really meant a lot that he went through so much trouble for me." Smith then came out of hiding and joined Comrie on the red carpet and proposed, telling her how much he loved her. Comrie accepted his proposal. The couple is planning an April 2006 wedding. "I really appreciate everything that ODOT did for us. They really helped me out and made it all appear real," said Smith. "It was really nice."

Impact Project

More than 100 eight graders from Grandview Heights Middle School (GHMS), along with their parents and teachers, cleaned up alleyways around Grandview April 16 for their "Impact Project." The event was organized by Grandview Heights Middle School's Family Consumer Science (FCS) teacher, Lin Bensen, Executive Director of Keep Franklin County Beautiful, Lindsey Christ, the Grandview Parks and Recreation Department and others.

Assistant Director for the City of Grandview Heights, Sean Robey, drove around the city prior to the cleanup date to choose specific areas to be cleaned up. He also arranged for city vehicles to come pick up the trash after the cleanup, which he later referred to as "quite a bit." According to Education Coordinator for Keep Columbus Beautiful, Stacey Law, the students collected six cubic yards of trash and an additional six cubic yards of yard waste.

The city workers couldn't believe the students had picked up so much, said Christ. "The community benefited from this because the city workers don't have the time for this kind of large scale clean up." At the end of the year for Bensen's FCS class the 8th graders are required to write a half-page paper about their favorite event of the year and over 50 students chose to write about the Impact Project. A common theme among the papers was how much they appreciated all the respect and thanks they received after the event. The Impact Project was such a success that many other middle school children around the Columbus area have expressed an interest in doing a similar event in their community.

Litter Free Day

The Dayton Dragons, a minor league baseball team, hosted a special litter awareness event at their stadium in Dayton on May 16. "Litter Free Day" was created as a way to encourage citizens to become more involved in litter prevention, while thanking the many volunteers of Montgomery County who already participate in such clean-up programs. Kiya Patrick, with the Montgomery County Solid Waste District, planned the event. She got the Dragons, the city of Dayton and her own department to co-sponsor the activities along with Coke, Wal-Mart, Mike-Sell's, and the Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT). ODOT provided a vehicle for entertainment.

"I can't thank ODOT enough," she said. "Partnerships like this one allow us to reach more people, and involve more people. We want to continue that." The main activities for Litter Free Day were held prior to a sold-out game against the Lansing Lugnuts. Over 200 volunteers of all ages from around the county came to enjoy food, drinks and entertainment. Volunteers got the chance to use a 25-foot climbing wall and a special "moon bounce."

Just before the game started, about 50 volunteers were put back to work distributing litter bags full of prizes to the 8,000 fans in the stands. Lucky the Lady Bug, Ohio's First Lady of Litter Prevention, threw the first pitch of the game and amused the kids by playing with the Dragon's mascot. Announcements were made promoting Litter Free Day and litter prevention during and after the game. And volunteers wearing "Plant Pride, Not Litter" T-shirts, walked around the stadium passing out promotional items and collecting trash. "The event was a huge success," said Patrick. "The volunteers really enjoyed themselves, and liked having the chance to help out again by raising litter awareness during the game."



Good, Clean, Fun Event

On May 15th more than 50 people volunteered to clean up the Weiss road area for "Good, Clean, Fun Day" in Galena, Ohio. This clean-up, marked the beginning of Central Ohio River Pride Week and

up litter and help clear areas for the Ohio to Erie trail to run through.

The portion going through Delaware County began work in 2000 and the

Friends of the Trail hope to get their portion finished in the next couple of years. The Ohio to Erie Trail is currently 60 percent complete. The Friends of the Trail volunteers collected about 1,000 pounds of trash and removed 10 tires from the side of Big Walnut Creek. River Pride



helped clear a way for the Ohio to Erie trail. The Ohio to Erie trail is a paved trail that will link Cincinnati, Columbus and Cleveland, and will run where many railroads and canals once were. The path will be available for biking, hiking, cross-country skiing, and other outdoor activities. The Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR) helped host the event and sent out a truck giving out pamphlets and trash collecting supplies. ODOT provided the event with their show mobile and passed out informational pamphlets to encourage participation in the Adopt-A-Highway program. The clean up had many supporters, including the Water and Wildlife Division of Columbus, the Village of Galena and Delaware County Health Department.

Week completed six cleanups during the week of the 15th and also conducted a tree planting and a storm drain marking event. This local version of the National River Cleanup Week was coordinated by the Columbus Division of Sewerage and Drainage and many other partner agencies.

A large part of this multi-purpose trail will be going through Westerville up to Delaware into Galena and on to Centerburg. Galena's Friends of the Trail group president Mike O'Neill was excited to combine River Pride Week with a chance to clear areas for the upcoming trail. The Friends of the Trail group in Galena is just one of many Friends of the Trail groups throughout the state of Ohio. These groups pick



Litter Rally

To inform taxpayers of the true cost of litter and to thank the Adopt-A-Highway volunteer groups a Summer Litter Rally was held at the Nationwide Arena Plaza on July 13 from 12 p.m. to 1 p.m.

The rally was conducted by the Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT), and the Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR). The DAVEY Resource Group, a research organization, was also present to talk about their recently completed statewide litter study.

ODOT, ODNR's Division of Recycling and Litter Prevention (DRLP) and DAVEY set up stands in the arena to promote litter prevention and give out informational pamphlets and other anti-litter paraphernalia. DAVEY released many of its findings from their litter study.

The study randomly picked 56 sites throughout the state and after taking data of those sites in both the fall of 2003 and spring of 2004 they were able to collect pages of useful data. This is the first statewide litter study in 20 years, and it was conducted so that grant money, awarded to state agencies for litter clean up, will be spent as efficiently as possible. Because of the results, state litter education programs can now focus on more concise problems and therefore be more effective in the fight against litter.

Many 10-and 15-year gold star groups active in the Adopt-A-Highway program were present to hear what Columbus Mayor Mike Coleman; Sam Speck, ODNR director; Gordon Proctor, ODOT director; and Ron Kolbash, chief of DRLP had to say about the growing litter problem in Ohio.

"I hate litter, I hate it," said Coleman. "What happens on the outside of our neighborhoods reflects on what's going on, on the inside."

Director Speck also sees litter as a social problem, and that it "inhibits our ability to advance economically."

In 2003 ODOT crews collected nearly 65,000 bags of trash along 970 lane miles of ODOT roads in Franklin County at a cost of \$286,000. Statewide, ODOT spent \$2.3 million on litter pick up and used 186,000 man hours to pick up 425,000 bags of trash, according to Director Proctor.

"Ohio's landscape is a beauty to be appreciated, but to other people it can be a trash can," said Proctor.