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Young, old join cleanups

> **Keeping our parks 'clean & beautiful'** <

By Kimberly Matas
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Once or twice a month groups of people spend time picking up trash in Northwest Side parks.

No, they're not performing court-mandated community service. They've adopted a park through Tucson Clean & Beautiful.

The nearly 20-year-old program partners with city and county governments to maintain area parks. Scouting and church groups, along with members of sororities, fraternities and neighborhood associations pick up litter, said B.J. Cordova, recycling education and community outreach coordinator for Tucson Clean & Beautiful.

Of the Northwest Side, Cordova said, "That area is rapidly expanding and growing ? litter is a problem anywhere in Tucson especially if it is not being taken care of by the community.

"Park employees do the best they can, but they are not at every single park every day."

When a group adopts a park, it is required to check the site twice a month and pick up trash. If volunteers find graffiti or broken equipment, they report the problems to Tucson Clean & Beautiful, which contacts the county about repairs.

After a three-month trial period, the formal adoption process begins, culminating in a ceremony and a sign designating the name of the group responsible for cleaning the park.

Though three park areas in unincorporated Pima County on the Northwest Side are monitored by volunteers, Cordova said there are 20 more park areas that need to be adopted. Other municipalities - Marana and Oro Valley - have their own volunteer clean-up operations.

As members of the nature-based religious group the Sonoran Sunrise Grove, entrepreneur Kirk Thomas and David Foster, a senior engineer at Raytheon Missile Systems, clean up a stretch of the Rillito River Park along West River Road between La Cholla Boulevard and La Cañada Drive.

As part of their church membership, the group is required to perform community service.

"We wanted to do something that was environmental," Thomas said, "and also that would draw our members together and something that's ongoing.

Want to get involved? Want to get involved?

Here are a few organizations that can help you get started:

* Tucson Clean & Beautiful Adopt-A-Park program:
www.cityoftucson.org/tcb or 791-3109.

* Arizona Department of Transportation Arizona Clean & Beautiful Adopt-A-Highway program: 1-800-358-0231.

* Marana's Adopt-A-Roadway and Adopt-A-Neighborhood programs:
www.marana.com/pubworks/pwrkframes.html and click on "Public involvement" or 297-2920.

* Oro Valley's Adopt-A-Roadway 229-5072.

We turn it into a social event for our members.

"It is a good thing. It's a nonreligious way we can all get together," he said. "We get really good feedback from the people using the Rillito River walk. There are always two or three people who say 'thank you' as we do our cleanup."

Between two and eight members of the group meet at the park twice a month. The first cleanup took four hours, Thomas said.

Since that initial litter lifting, the group is able to clean the park - both sides of the river - in an hour or two, depending upon the number of members who show up, Thomas said.

Vicky Johnson, a Girl Scout troop leader and service unit manager for the Flowing Wells area, gets all her 14 troops involved in cleaning up Wildwood Park near West Orange Grove Road and North Camino de la Tierra. For three years the troops have taken turns once a month to keep the park clean.

"We're cleaning the parks so people can play and be safe," said Johnson's daughter, Melissa, 9.

Another troop member, Alyssa Deters, 10, said, "Some people just don't really care about throwing their trash away, and they think maybe no one will see them and throw it on the ground."

During cleanups, she said, the girls sometimes challenge each other to see how much trash each team can pick up.

Girl Scout Jennifer Trueblood, 9, said cleaning the park is fun. "We get to be with our friends and we get to help the community."

Sometimes people using the park talk to the Girl Scouts.

"They say 'that's good,' and 'that's really good you're doing that for the community,' " Jennifer said. "It makes me feel good that I'm doing the right thing."

** Contact reporter Kimberly Matas at 807-8431 or kmatas@azstarnet.com.*

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