



PHOTOS BY JEFF ANTENORE

Volunteers search for trash in Pittsford Park during the inaugural Clean Lake Forest event Saturday morning.

Keeping the neighborhood clean

Clean Lake Forest initiative is tapping enthusiasm of city's Trash Walkers

By Tess Sheets
Correspondent

During his morning walks, Lake Forest Councilman Robert Pequeño sometimes would pass by litter strewn along the city's streets and think, "Look at all this trash; somebody should pick it up."

But he quickly answered his own call and said he started collecting bottles, cans and other junk during his daily trek throughout his district. And after joining a Facebook group of residents that collects litter — called Lake Forest Area Trash Walkers — he was inspired to get the city involved, he said, hoping to create a program that

CLEAN » PAGE 8



Lake Forest Councilman Robert Pequeño, right, and Suzy Betts, left, who helped organize the inaugural Clean Lake Forest event, welcome volunteers to a staging area at Pittsford Park on Saturday.

Clean

CONTINUED FROM ON PAGE A3

FROM PAGE 3

encourages community members to take initiative in keeping the city clean.

The effort, called Clean Lake Forest, hosted its first event Saturday, expecting to draw a crowd of roughly 100 volunteers for three hours of trash picking starting and ending at Pittsford Park.

When considering the initiative, Penqueño said it was important that the city's role come without cost. Council members in March voted unanimously for the program, agreeing to endorse the cleanup events through social media posts and sponsor a couple per year.

Mayor Scott Voigts said it was "imperative" that residents try to make a difference by helping keep Lake Forest clean, adding, "Just driving by trash on the road is a detriment to the beauty of our city."

Partnering with groups such as the Lake Forest Chamber of Commerce and the Kiwanis Club, Clean Lake Forest will organize trash pickup and waste disposal events. Its goal is also to partner with local organizations and businesses willing to donate time, money or equipment.

Funds for supplies, such as trash bags, gloves, trash grabber tools and vests, will come from donations. Pequeño said some already have rolled in. A former colleague gifted more than a hundred vests and trash pickers, and Home Depot made a donation of trash bags, he said.

Pequeño also donated a portion of his monthly stipend from the city to the Kiwanis Club for the program, he said.

"We're trying not to get the city too involved because we don't want them to spend money on this, but if we can get just the citizens that come out and pick up trash in their neighborhood, it will make the city a little bit more attractive," Pequeño said of his vision for the program.

While volunteers are picking up litter, they're encouraged to use the Ask Lake Forest app to note blights around the city, such as downed fences, graffiti or broken park equipment. After Saturday's event, a barbecuestyle lunch was served, and participants received a signed certificate from the mayor.

The initiative encourages residents to join the Trash Walkers group and "take ownership" for beautifying the city, Pequeño said. The group's Facebook page boasts more than 50 members, who often post photos and videos of their trash bags full of collected litter. At the March council meeting, Clean Lake Forest co-founder Suzy Betz described the city's residents as "committed to being good stewards to our environment."

Clean Lake Forest will host its second event in September on National CleanUp Day, when groups all over the country host improvement projects.

Pequeño said there has been widespread desire among residents to get their hands dirty. The initiative has gotten only positive feedback, which he called rare, saying, "Usually, you know, no good deed goes unpunished."

As the program kicks off, he said he hopes that eagerness keeps growing.

"I hope that I'm overwhelmed by this."



Pooja Agarwal and her son Raghav Agarwal of Irvine help pick up trash in Lake Forest's Pittsford Park during the city's inaugural Clean Lake Forest event Saturday.

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Sunday, 05/23/2021 Page .A008

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