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Local officials survey litter problem in preparation for Great American Cleanup

(March 16, 2010) Troup County Commissioners and Mayor Jeff Lukken met for a roadside rendezvous Tuesday morning. Their meeting place, a stretch of West Point Road littered with trash and debris, was being surveyed by volunteers with Keep Troup Beautiful to determine which areas need the most attention at the upcoming Great American Cleanup on April 17. The elected leaders got a close-up view of trash-strewn roadsides.



Troup County Commissioner Ken Smith, second from left, discusses his pet peeve—litter—with other local leaders who met Tuesday with Keep Troup Beautiful (KTB) volunteers to assess the problem of trash on area roadsides. Tackling the litter issue are, from left, County Commission Chairman Ricky Wolfe, Smith, KTB Chairman Bob Wiggins, LaGrange Mayor Jeff Lukken, and KTB board members Howard Mingo and Michael Markle.

Keep Troup Beautiful (KTB) Executive Director Doris Jefferson said KTB volunteers started their annual litter survey Monday and by today had determined that the amount of roadside trash throughout Troup County has increased since the last litter survey conducted a year ago.

“The problem is worse than last year and there are really some tough areas, like here on West Point Road,” said Jefferson, pointing out trash near the Teaver Road intersection that included beer bottles, used lottery tickets, sheetrock debris, fast food wrappers and cups, paper bags and other unsightly waste.

Even though last year’s Great American Cleanup was the most successful in the history of the spring cleanup, with an estimated 40,000 pounds of trash collected, according to Jefferson, the roadsides didn’t stay tidy for long.

“Unfortunately, since last year we’ve made no real progress,” said County Commission Chairman Ricky Wolfe. The Commissioners led a county team that picked up 1,051 bags of trash to claim victory at last year’s first Troup Trash Bash Challenge, a competition among local leaders to see which government entity could haul in the most trash during the Great American Cleanup. “Even with a lot of work and effort, we’ve really not improved and we’ve got to figure out a way to solve this problem.”

Along with challenging local governments to outdo one another at this year’s Cleanup, Wolfe and County Commissioner Ken Smith challenge area churches, businesses, youth groups and other organizations to participate in the spring event. In the meantime, Troup County will seek to keep its status as the local government picking up the most trash.

“If the City of LaGrange wants to get reinforcements from Hogansville or West Point to be a better competitor for us, just do it,” said Smith, poking good natured fun at Mayor Lukken whose LaGrange team placed last at the 2009 Troup Trash Bash.

“I would never accuse the County of cheating,” Lukken countered with a grin.

All joking aside, Wolfe expressed concern over the increase in volume of roadside garbage. “It’s worse than last year,” he said. “We’re losing the battle against trash, and that’s terrible.”

Jefferson expressed appreciation for the local leaders bringing the issue into the spotlight and looks forward to seeing them out in full force during the April 17 event.

“People appreciate seeing their elected leaders are not beyond getting out there and pickup up trash,” she said. “The commissioners really had fun last year and their participation shows kids that the people who make the rules we live by are real people who care about the same things they do, which includes keeping our cities and county clean and beautiful.”

To challenge youth to take part in the Great American Cleanup, Keep Troup Beautiful and Wal-Mart are co-sponsoring a High School Beautification Contest. Each private and public high school is encouraged to complete one community improvement project, chosen by the students, under the supervision of a teacher and performed either on or off campus. The project must involve a minimum of five students with at least 40 total hours of work time devoted to the program. The KTB Beautification Committee will visit project sites to judge the work with the winner announced at closing ceremonies at the April 17 Cleanup. All participating groups will earn a pizza party while the project winner earns \$500 for their school to use on additional school beautification projects.

For more information or to pre-register for the Great American Cleanup, call Keep Troup Beautiful at 706-884-9922 or 706-883-8215 or email the executive director at djefferson@asginfo.net. Registration forms may be downloaded from the KTB Web site at www.keeptroupbeautiful.com or picked up at KTB offices at 251 S.L. White Boulevard, off Callaway Church Road; Troup County Government Center; or LaGrange Daily News.