Keeping Sidney Looking Its Best

By Mike Barhorst

Nearly every day as I enter City Hall, I pick up at least one piece of debris and put it in the refuse container that is just outside the door I enter. There is never a shortage of items from which to choose to pick up - beverage containers, food wrappers, even yesterday’s newspaper blowing in the wind.

Frustratingly, some of the litter is mere inches from the garbage container. I almost always find myself wondering why the individual who left each item behind could not have placed it inside the garbage can.

I grew up on a farm, and periodically I or one of my siblings would walk the side ditches along the farm’s fields and pick up debris. Glass beverage containers – usually beer bottles – were common. So were numerous other items that people simply threw out their vehicle’s window as they drove past.

There has been some improvement in our behavior. The 2009 National Visible Litter Survey and Litter Cost Study reported that, “While visible roadside litter is down 61% since 1969, litter, and littering behavior, remains a persistent and costly problem.” The study estimated that litter cleanup costs the United States more than $11.5B each year.

The study reported that cigarette butts were the most frequently littered item. Cigarette butts were followed by food remnants, food wrappers and containers, beverage containers, napkins and paper including straw wrappers.

To help curb the litter issue, it is important that businesses and public spaces have proper disposal receptacles that are both convenient and accessible. The presence of ash receptacles, either as stand-alone, or integrated into a trash can, correlates with lower rates of cigarette butt littering.

In general, littered environments tend to attract more litter. Keeping areas litter-free goes a long way in reducing reoccurring litter problems.

Even so, litter remains a persistent problem, even in neighborhoods. Often after I mow my lawn, I will sweep the street in front of my home. Even though my lot is not very wide, I almost always get a five-gallon bucket full of “stuff”. Nearly every week, there are several dozen cigarette butts, the remnants of candy and food wrappers, the occasional nut or bolt that has come off a passing vehicle and of course, grass clippings and twigs.

If not cleaned up, all of that litter would eventually end up in the storm sewer catch basin further down the street. Catch basins are storm sewer inlets that filter out debris such as leaves and litter. They are typically located next to street curbs.

It is important to keep catch basins free of litter to prevent storm sewer blockages and minimize the amount of pollutants entering the storm sewers. Clogged catch basins can also cause water to pond along streets and in yards and parking lots. This flooding is not only a nuisance, but a potential danger to passing motorists and nearby businesses.

Because of Sidney’s location on I-75, each and every day visitors stop by our community who have never been here before. The fact that our City is a manufacturing center also brings visitors here who have never previously visited the community. Still others stop for the first time to visit one of the local attractions including the Ross Historical Center, the Peoples Federal Savings & Loan Association building, the Big-Four Bridge, the Monumental Building, The Spot and Tawawa Park. A visitor’s first impression of the community is often formed by their perception of how clean our community appears.

In a recent guest editorial, I addressed economic development. Helping to keep our community clean is one of the things that each of us can do to help promote economic development. Making certain that the first impression a visitor has of Sidney is of a well-kept community is a small step in encouraging first-time visitors to want to return.
While the City of Sidney does not have a formalized community litter pickup program, I would like to encourage residents and businesses to help keep Sidney beautiful. Join in the fight against litter your respective neighborhood. Pick up debris that may have collected in your yard at least weekly.

I would encourage businesses to place both trash and ash receptacles in accessible places. I would also encourage you to daily remove litter around your establishment.

Finally, place a receptacle in your vehicle to collect beverage containers, empty food containers and other debris that accumulates. If you still smoke, empty your ash tray in an appropriate place. If each of us does our part, the community will appear a more welcoming place in which to visit and live.

In case you think one personal can’t make a difference, local resident Jim Abbott was last year observed removing litter from along the roadside. His good deed was brought to my attention, and I learned that he regularly picks up trash as he walks along the road into town. I would encourage you to let his good example become one that you emulate!