



Saturday in Alton will be dedicated to having a cleaner city with litter cleanups and trash can dedications

by Cory Davenport, Contributing Writer
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ALTON – Saturday will be a day for Altonians to truly show their love for their community – by keeping it clean.

The bi-annual City Wide Litter Cleanup will take place Saturday, April 28, throughout the entire city. The effort is chaired by Alton Main Street Executive Director Sara McGibany with help from Emily Keener and current PRIDE, Inc. President Monica Semnacher. Semnacher said the trio has been meeting monthly since February to get in touch with volunteer groups and consult their spreadsheet to ensure all of Alton has been covered by volunteers or established groups in the cleanup.

“We work with a really impressive spreadsheet that has been updated throughout the years to cover as much of Alton as possible with no overlaps,” she said via Facebook Messenger. “We still have a few streets yet to be assigned and groups can still organize and get assigned between now and the 9 a.m. starting time this Saturday.

“We hope this bi-annual cleanup inspires Alton residents to take better care of our city and consider the impact of single-use plastics. So much of our litter ends up in our waterways and we all know what a huge asset our Mississippi River is for our region. We hope everyone joins us on this beautiful day to clean up our community and continue to take opportunities to clean up any litter you see throughout the year. It's a simple way to show you love Alton.”

Single-use plastic pollution has been a hot-button issue on social media with videos of sea turtles choking on straws. According to a July 2017 article from National Geographic said as much as 8.3 billion metric tons of plastic have been trashed without recycling since mass production of plastics began six decades ago. That waste causes harm to not only sea turtles, but birds, marine mammals and fish as well.

In fact, businesses such as Old Bakery Beer Company have taken to utilizing biodegradable straws in its drinks and many people are carrying steel and glass straws with them to prevent pollution from plastic straws, which are some of the worst single-use offenders.

Social media has also helped bolster litter cleanups across the globe, and that trend includes the Riverbend. McGibany said the litter cleanup, which is held twice a year, continues to see an increase in attendance.

“It's really exciting to see litter removal start to get the attention it deserves, because it's something that anyone can help with and it really is a fundamental quality-of-life issue,” she said in a Facebook message. “This spring we've had the biggest turnout ever with groups signing up to adopt areas for the city-wide litter cleanup, and independent groups are popping up left and right to take care of the problem areas between the big biannual efforts. It's a clear indicator that people do care about the appearance of our town and the health of our environment.”

Meeting places for the cleanup are Downtown at 200 W. Third Street (just outside the Riverbender building), Middletown at Hellrung Park, located at Seventh and Central Avenue, Upper Alton at Sherry's Snacks, located at 2500 College Avenue, and North Alton from Joe K's Restaurant, located at 2530 State Street.

The Facebook event encourages people to clean their own neighborhoods and deposit litter in their own trash and recycling bins. Gloves and bags will be provided to those taking part in the cleanup as well.

Semnacher, who has worked for the betterment and enhancement of James Killion Park as well, said she would like people to end their cleaning efforts at James Killion Park for the 1 p.m. debut and dedication of 18 trash cans painted by local students.



Those trash cans are being dedicated by the James Killion Beautification Enhancement Committee in response to a summer 2017 incident during which basketball rims were removed from the park due to what the city described as “excessive littering.”

Another Alton park, which has fallen into a state of neglect and disrepair before efforts in recent years to revive it, will have a special focus during the litter cleanup this Saturday as well. April Gray, the mother of Trinity Buel, a 17-year-old girl who died in a tragic car crash earlier this year, will be hosting a special litter cleanup around Norside Park, which will start at 9 a.m. with the rest of the city's effort.

This will be the second litter cleanup held in her daughter's memory. This one will be sponsored by the newly-established non-profit made in Buel's honor, called Trinity's

Way. The first litter cleanup by the group, which includes Gray as well as Chris Unthank and Eric Konkol, saw 50 volunteers clean more than 20 large bags of trash left behind by both litterbugs and flooding from Piasa Park. Buel had recently written an article about that park for an online environmental magazine.

The second cleanup in Buel's honor is receiving help from volunteers from the SNIP Alliance, which works to provide low-cost spay and neutering services to low income pet owners in Madison County. Bags and gloves will also be provided at that event, which Gray said is not officially a part of the citywide cleanup.

“We are not officially signed up as a team with the City-Wide Cleanup,” she said in a Facebook message. “Just concentrating on an area close to home that was not adopted to be cleaned. We will have gloves, trash bags and a container for disposal of any sharps that might be found stationed at Norside Park.

“My kids have spent a lot of time there even though we live a few blocks away. My son wants to see a skate park go in there! Dream big, I tell him.”

Like the overall City-Wide Litter Cleanup, people are invited to arrive at Norside Park Saturday morning and get to work.

