



Your Turn
Frank Manzullo
Guest columnist

Come be part of making great impression

Some people, after their first visit to a city, comment to their friends about how clean and neat it looked. It's the image they are talking about, what they saw: their first impression.

A first impression is hard to erase. It sticks with us.

Community leaders try to attract businesses and industry to Winnebago County. As a community, we need new businesses to survive and flourish. We need good paying jobs. We need a strong tax base to keep our schools healthy, repair the streets and plow the snow.

But what impression of our city do visiting executives form? We can make it a good one. There's a simple way.

As children, we were taught that we can't change the world, but we can change one little piece of it: our community, our neighborhood, our home.

One of the easiest and most visible changes happens when we clean up our roads and byways. My parents taught us kids to keep things neat.

I even remember raking the alley behind our house with my dad. That lesson stuck with me. Today, as I walk, I still pick up that ugly litter.

But I can't clean the whole city by myself. And once a year, during the Great American Cleanup, hundreds and hundreds of volunteers join me in tidying up our hometown.

The Great American Cleanup is an annual event held on the last Saturday of April.

The weather is usually nice by then and grass and weeds haven't grown so high that they hide the trash from sight.

That's when the call goes out to clean up the mess left by those who use streets and roads and yards as trash cans. It's not fair that others should have to do this. But every spring, 1,500 volunteers pick up someone else's litter.

They do it because they are selfless. They do it because they care about the environment. They do it because they love their community. They do it because it's the right thing to do. They do it because it's fun to work together for a good cause with like-minded people.

Join me this spring as Keep Northern Illinois Beautiful hosts the 34th annual Great American Cleanup on Saturday morning, April 29.

Parents bring the kids; friends, neighbors, scouts, and church groups band together, or just come by yourself.

Groups and individuals must register online at KNIB.org. Students can earn service hours for school.

I will help get you organized and shepherd you about where to go and what to do. Bags and tongs and safety vests are provided.

With your help, all our little efforts can coalesce into a huge change.

When I see those full, yellow cleanup bags on the curbs on that last Saturday of April, I feel grateful for the people who care. And I feel proud of our city, so neat and clean. It leaves me with a good impression.

Frank Manzullo is the coordinator of Keep Northern Illinois Beautiful's 34th annual Great American Cleanup.