

# Quiz, culture and, oh yeah, community service

*A day on the pavement with community service taskmaster (and trivia buff) Wayne Baseden*

BY ROBERT BRITT  
STAFF WRITER

Leading his community service crew through the heart of downtown Portland, crew-leader Wayne Baseden doesn't so much as slow his stride when he poses a question to the group.

"Which country lies furthest north on the continent of Africa?" Baseden asks. "Is it Tunisia, Sudan, Madagascar or Nigeria?"

One of the 12 members of the crew, each wearing a fluorescent yellow reflective vest branded with "Community Court Crew" on the back, hesitantly guesses Sudan.

"I might even suggest you change your mind," Baseden offers, before pointing out some trash along the curb of NW Davis that needed to be picked up.

Not heeding the advice, the group stands by the incorrect answer while removing cigarette butts and other litter from the area. Despite missing the answer, ample time still remained for redemption, as this was just one of more than 50 questions that Baseden would ask his litter removal crew on a Thursday late last month.

Baseden, 62, has spent the past three years leading community service work crews for Portland's Westside Community Court, which handles the adjudication of petty violations in the Clean & Safe District.

"I have these strangers, all wearing the mighty yellow jacket and picking up trash," Baseden said. "I could leave it at that, but I don't."

Instead, as Baseden leads his crew around the sidewalks of downtown Portland to clean up litter, he quizzes them on topics ranging from world geography to pop music. He is engaging them with what he calls "cultural literacy."

"Some people call it trivia," Baseden says. "But the goal is to be able to talk to



PHOTO BY ROBERT BRITT

anyone about anything."

Hours before, as Baseden checked the names on his roster and passed out the vests and other tools of the trade — brooms, dustpans, trigger-action trash pickers, and a pushcart to ferry an industrial-sized garbage can — he set the tone for the day.

"Everybody in here," Baseden said as he gestured to the group, "This is your Internet. This is your Facebook. This is your Cash Cab."

According to the Portland Business Alliance, which manages the Clean & Safe District and the Westside Community Court, 134 people reported for community service on Baseden's crew in the month of April. In that time, they removed 123 bags of litter from 972 city blocks and cleared 598 drains.

More than 7,000 people have performed community service through the Community Court program, and the PBA estimates the value of the restitution done by the crews to be worth nearly half a million dollars.

Alexandria, a 20-year-old student at PCC, ended up on Baseden's crew after being cited for failing to pay MAX fare. (The last names of those serving on the Community Court Crew were omitted out of respect for their privacy.)

"We had three options," she said. "It was go to jail, pay the fine, or do eight hours of community service."

Baseden says people generally end up on

his work crew because of their values, attitudes and beliefs, which stem from their choices and decisions.

"Oftentimes, the people who come to see me are people who have made one or a series of the same kinds of mistakes," he said. "A key thing that I've had to do is to challenge their thinking, not only on an individual level, but also as a group," he said. "So I use teaching techniques such as cooperative learning. I use the group dynamic, where the whole is greater than the individual."

"What I try to do is get people to think about their decisions and what they're doing," Baseden said. "And then from there, they can make better decisions for themselves so they don't have to come back and do community service."


Heading out of the parking garage at NW 1st and Davis, Baseden quickly fell into the role of quizmaster.

"What is the second-oldest toy in the world?" he asked. "Is it the doll, the Yo-Yo, or none of the above?"

**"You have to be a little of an entertainer. You have to be the psychologist. You have to be the counselor. You have to know when people need help."**

— WAYNE BASEDEN

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