

TRACES from page 1A

The city has been in contact with Block for multiple months. Many of those interactions are recorded on his Facebook page, "Leaven No Trace." Ultimately, Florence Police Department issued several citations against Block on Sept. 11.

According to Block, his goal is to "implement programs and projects so the city itself can handle the trash problem. My hope, my goal is that my organization is no longer needed one day."

The conflict is not in the goal of clearing trash, but in the disposal. In fact, the city has an Adopt-A-Street program specifically to help people beautify streets, and a companion one for area parks. Through the program, people are able to register with the city, select a stretch of roadway, and commit to cleaning it a handful of times throughout the year.

Public Works Director Mike Miller said some people go above and beyond, like Mike and Pat

Allen, who clear Rhododendron Drive each week.

"They do a great job. ... I think we only require three or four times a year to actually go out and pick up litter on the right away," he said. "This couple, they actually go out there every weekend, picking up waste, which they collect and take home, because it's not a whole lot in a month's time."

In a month, it might make up 20 to 30 pounds of material.

"They bring it home and give us a call to come out. Then we pick up the garbage and dispose appropriately," Miller said.

Because the program is through the city, Public Works is able to provide the training, safety equipment, trash grabbers, gloves and containers for different kinds of materials.

"We want our volunteers to be safe, too," Miller said.

In addition, the city can plan for the disposal of the waste. As Block's actions have gone on, city staff have had to remove Leaven No Trace's bags of garbage while they are on the clock,



COURTESY PHOTO

Bags left behind by Leaven No Trace get a spray painted emoji.

often pulling workers from other jobs.

When the city plans events to clean up areas, "We want to make sure that the dumpsters are available," Miller said. "The material is packaged, put in the dumpster, and then taken away appropriately to a landfill. Whether that's the Lane County Transfer Station or, more likely, going directly over to the Short Mountain Landfill so it's not handled multiple times."

The city, as well as other entities, relies on volunteers to do much of this work.

City Manager Erin Reynolds said, "We have a lot of awesome volunteers, in addition to our amazing Public Works staff. And it's not just Public Works, ob-

viously, we work as a team as a city, but also all governmental agencies that manage public rights of way and public lands."

People can volunteer in many capacities, and sometimes come together for bigger events specifically to beautify, clean up or in other ways benefit the area.

"We have a lot of groups that come together for the Power of Florence, and we work with those to be the most efficient and effective with our resources," Messmer said.

That day of service features people from across the community, including Boy and Girl Scouts, Florence Garden Club, elementary students and dozens of groups, uniting for a day of volunteering.

"We partner with them," Miller said. "Whether it's vegetation removal, Scotch broom or cleaning up different projects, we bring additional resources and even the official crews."

Other city projects have come out of people's individual or collective efforts, including the Singing Pines Dog Park, which has recently had improvements thanks to community volunteers and fundraising.

For Messmer, "We do rely a lot on our volunteers in every aspect of the city. We have our committees, Commander John Pitcher has volunteers at the police department, Public Works has a lot of volunteers, the Florence Events Center wouldn't be able to operate without volunteers. So we're always open to people volunteering and helping."

She emphasized, however, that the city has limited resources for its city staff and must follow permitting procedures.

Block feels like the city is not doing enough.

"As far as I've seen in the past six years, the main issue is the government not doing their job," he said. "They have decided it is too much work, it is too stressful or whatever it might be. They've decided that is no longer a priority to them to keep the trash cleaned up."

He also said that the city "won't even appreciate someone that comes in and wants to do the cleanup without them covering the entire project. I only asked them to dispose of the trash and allow me to do my awareness program."

Some efforts have been made from both the city side and the Leaven No Trace to work together, but that changed last Saturday.

"Block was cited, and that was at my direction," said Pitcher. "He stacked several bags in three or four different locations on the sidewalks, partially blocking the sidewalks, and tied them up to light posts and stop signs. We had to get a hold of Public Works to come out and get them."

The citations occurred after multiple interactions with Code Enforcement Officer Dan Frazier and the Florence Police, and after the city offered several solutions, including the use of dumpsters or large,

durable bags.

Leaven No Trace, however, relies on the message of the stacked bags.

"I do put them in a position where people can see them," Block said. "And then I put my little emoji on it. So it'll get people to feel when they see the emoji the sad, mad, crazy faces."

After he was cited, Block posted to social media: "After putting 10 more bags of trash by Safeway on 101 again this morning, I was tracked down by Florence PD and given four charges of Offensive Littering, Disorderly Conduct II and Criminal Mischief III and I was told if I continue to clean up the community I will go to jail! (sic)"

The next steps, according to Pitcher, involve a court date through Florence Municipal Court.

"If he continues to do other things, those will also be referred to the prosecutor as well, and we'll investigate those," he continued. "We'll then determine if there are more crimes or are higher levels of crimes. But for now, with the ones that we've issued, they'll go to municipal court, and he'll have to face those charges."

This is not the first time Block has been tried.

"I've actually been cited throughout the years," he said. "Coos County gave me seven tickets for offensive littering and disorderly conduct. I took them all to trial."

He said he won some of the cases and lost some of them.

Florence Police charged Block with littering for placing the bags; for criminal mischief for the work that it took for Public Works to have to come out and cut the bags off the posts and signs, and then dispose of them; and for disorderly conduct for blocking the sidewalks.

"We don't know what's in those bags," Pitcher said. "People could go up and get cut or punctured by going near them. We have pedestrians and kids out there playing, walking on the sidewalks. We just can't allow that. It's a safety issue."

It's also an issue of ADA-compliance and maintaining access.

"It's just really unsafe conditions," Pitcher added.

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