

"One butt at a time" pair cleans up CG streets

By Caitlyn May
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Elaine Burns keeps her bucket in the trunk of her car and arrives early to her appointments so she can spend a few minutes doing it. Ken Roe's routine is a bit more strict. He pulls on his purple vest and sets out from J St., sometimes traveling as far as Safeway collecting a bucket-full along the way. Together, Burns and Roe have rid Cottage Grove of over 100 pounds of discarded cigarette butts.

"You can almost feel Mother Earth say 'ooohh thank you' like you reached a spot she couldn't itch," Burns said. She's been a resident of Cottage Grove since 1989 and when she found longtime friend Roe in the same city two years ago, it wasn't long before they became the duo known for picking up filters.

The pair can spend up to 15 hours a week roaming the parking lots and back alleys of Cottage Grove collecting the cigarette filters that would otherwise seep carcinogens into the ground and water.

"The tobacco, that came from nature and nature will take care of it. We want the filters with all the chemicals," Roe said.

Both Burns and Roe are smokers and their message is clear: They're not against smoking, they're against the subsequent "flicking."

"Look, see here the trash can is right here and let's see how many we can find," Roe said, approaching a city trash can on Main St. one late afternoon last week. He rounded the bin, picker in hand and began counting. Within a minute, his white bucket proclaiming the duo's slogan,

"One butt at a time" had nine new cigarette filters.

"The biggest offenders are parked cars and people waiting for the light to change," Burns said, gesturing to the short line of cars waiting for the traffic light to let them escape 6th St. and head onto Main St.

Other hot spots are parking lots and certain areas tucked away throughout the city.

"There are hidey-holes you get to know," Roe said, zig-zagging from street to sidewalk as he plucked up cigarette filters along the way. He finally landed in a corner of the grass yard surrounding city hall and stopped knowingly at a pile of no less than 10 cigarette butts.

"Someone smokes this certain brand and does it right here," he said, shaking his head and adding the discarded filters to his bucket.

Burns and Roe don't have a set schedule for what they laughingly describe as "butt-picking." If the weather is nice, they'll head out together and form a game plan in a parking lot or five-block area. Burns will take curbside; Roe will be on the look out for filters in the street. And even though they don't have a set schedule, they do work on holidays.

"Christmas is the only day Walmart is closed. We went to the parking lot, put our buckets down and just started collecting," Burns said.

When they've collected for a few months, they wrap their findings in old bread bags. Burns will spray the packages in lavender to save the UPS handlers the stink of ashes, tar and chemicals and then send the butts off to TerraCycle.

The company pays for the shipping,

even the 93 pound package Burns and Roe once sent, and turns the discarded cigarette filters into things like plastic outdoor furniture, ash trays and pet bowls.

TerraCycle specializes in hard to recycle material according to its website, "Whether it's coffee capsules from your home, pens from a school, or plastic gloves from a manufacturing facility, TerraCycle can collect and recycle almost any form of waste." The company has partnered with individuals in 20 different countries and to date has more than 63 million people like Burns and Roe raising money for charity by cleaning up waste and sending it in to be recycled.

While Burns and Roe have memorized the city's street cleaning schedule, they say there's more the city can do. "Putting the filters in the trash is fine but we recycle so we'd like to get to them before the city's street sweeper does," said Roe.

Burns has a solution. "In other cities they have tubes that go on the telephone polls that collect the filters and then people like us can go along and pick them up," she said. "I'd love to collaborate with the city on something like that."

Until then, the pair says they'll continue doing what they're doing. They'll keep hitting Axe and Fiddle on Sunday mornings, scooping out parking lots at Walmart, BiMart and Safeway, and ignoring those who find their purple vests, white buckets, pickers and smiles offensive.

"You have some people like that," Roe said, "but we also have a lot of people who stop and say thank you."



Elaine Burns and Ken Roe work to clean-up Cottage Grove of discarded cigarette butts.

VFW hosts weekly dinner for the community

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Will Parrish makes no bones about the dessert tonight. It's cobbler, not pie. Also on the menu, chicken pasta primavera that was started at 10 a.m. this morning by Parrish and his band of volunteers that includes the junior vice commander's wife, his own wife, students

from Willamette Leadership Academy and other helping hands.

The dining room at VFW Post 3473 is full tonight. There are members, non-members, familiar faces and, according to the regulars, there's always at least one new face among the crowd during the weekly Friday night dinner.

"It depends on the weather. If it's raining there's less people but if it's like it was today, then yes we usually have a full house," said a kitchen volunteer. She's Ken Hunt's wife and routinely spends her

Fridays in the kitchen just off the entrance of the post.

"I was coming almost every week but then my husband was commander and I thought 'the commander's wife should probably be here every week,'" she said during a break between serving salads and prepping the Army-sized pans of pasta.

Now, she preps dinner every week with Parrish and the rest of the volunteers. They can serve the entire dining room at once with volunteer servers fluttering about, handing out soup, salad, an entree and dessert beginning at 5:30 p.m.

"The dinner has been at five but if you work and get off at five it's hard to get here," said Dennis Twite, the current commander of the post. His wife jokes of a candle and turned down lights. "I get a date night every week," she said.

Other VFW members span entire tables with their families. Auxiliary president Carolin Pettit brought her visiting family from Albany, grandkids and children to tonight's feast, which she'll help clean-up later.

"The money we raise goes to our veterans, it helps veterans," she said, noting the \$9 entry fee for the four-course meal.

The hall fills up with chatter and calls for friends to join friends while a 50/50 raffle garners one winner and one "so close." Spaghetti night garners the largest crowd while liver and onions draw die-heart fans and their families who take solace in the second meal provided on those nights because the VFW Friday dinner is about comfort and camaraderie. It's goal is to raise money to help other veterans and currently, it's being hosted in a building in need of help as well.

The post has submitted for grants to bring their restrooms into compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act but so far, it's been denied one and is still waiting for the other. It is, however, taking donations. To donate, contact Dennis Twite at (541) 942-7099. To attend the weekly Friday dinner, visit the post at 3160 Hillside Dr. Dinner is \$9 for adults and \$4 for children.

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