

Graffiti's a crime



Graffiti artists left their mark on this Whyte Avenue business.

The slash of red across the side of a building; the black splatter of lines dripping down a transit shelter or hydro box; the tinted dashes and squiggles that mark up the walls of an underpass—this is the work of a vandal with aerosol cans.

“Graffiti is one of those crimes where people don’t even realize it’s a crime,” says Don Belanger, project manager for Capital City Clean Up. “For years, people have thought it’s just mischievous kids doing stupid things on private or public property.”

Ignoring graffiti encourages the “Broken Window Theory” —if you don’t keep on top of the small repairs of a building, people will see it as an easy target for more damage. To stop that spiral, graffiti needs to be removed immediately.

Another reason for its immediate erasure, he notes, is that while many spray paint wielders are just bored youth with time on their hands, a lot of the markings are either repeat offenders or gang-related and designed to stake out territory.

Contact the police at 423-4567 before it’s removed, though. Because these vandals often use the same markings, pictures can be taken to build up a case against the offender.

“And if someone sees someone applying graffiti to a property they should call 911 and the police will respond immediately because it’s an act in progress and hopefully they’ll catch the offender,” says Belanger.

Leading the way

An innovative adopt-a-block program between local businesses, not-for-profit groups and the city of Edmonton is just the beginning for Capital City Clean Up’s Business Advisory Committee.

Because of Alberta’s hot economy, finding the labour to keep commercial properties tidy is a headache most owners would rather avoid. That’s why the committee came up with the Business Supporting Community program.

By matching up with a not-for-profit organization such as the Girl Guides of Canada or a church youth group, a business can pay its partner to cleanup litter on its block once a week throughout the summer.

“We all do what we can to be involved in the communities we do business in and our employees live in,” says Ross MacLean, territory manager for Shell Canada and the co-chair of the Business Advisory Committee. “And this provides another opportunity for fundraising for non-profit groups.”

But the adopt-a-block program isn’t the only issue on the committee’s agenda. The group is also looking at issues such as graffiti, cigarette litter and more public waste receptacles.

“We’ve got the committee and we’ve got the cleanup program going,” says MacLean. “The next stage is to see what improvements we can make and to grow the number of businesses participating and the areas in the city that we can have cleaned up. And that’s on the agenda for July.”

Who’s on Board?

- Boardwalk Properties
- Boston Pizza
- Building Owners & Managers Association of Edmonton
- Canada Safeway
- Edmonton Apartment Association
- Mac’s Convenience Stores
- McDonald’s Canada
- Real Canadian Superstore
- 7-Eleven Food Stores
- Shell Canada
- Tim Hortons

2007 program ambassador

Sometimes it's the simplest ideas that pack the most punch.

When Landmark Homes installed regular residential garbage bins at each new-home construction site in 2006, the results were so impressive that the Canadian Home Builders' Association—Edmonton Region chose them as this year's ambassador for Capital City Clean Up.

"Traditionally builders hire people to collect the garbage that is gathered on site," explains Ali Imdad, Landmark's site maintenance manager. "But you've got to schedule them and wait for these guys to come, and the wind can blow it all through the neighbourhood. These bins provide a cleaner, safer environment for our trade partners and a collection system that eliminates garbage being strewn and blown throughout the neighbourhood. In the eyes of the developers, municipalities in which we build, and owners of occupied homes in the subdivision this is huge step towards improving our image as a good corporate citizen."

While items such as drywall, concrete, glue and other hazardous materials must be dealt with separately, trades people can pitch everything else into the convenient cans. "The trades just love it. All they've got to do after they finish their work is throw the stuff into the bin on the way to their trucks." Even better is the fact that he's recently noticed bins at other homebuilders' sites too, proving that simple ideas can have a major impact.

Landmark Homes mandate is to reduce the waste produced during the construction process through the better management of materials. They aim to provide a more efficient work environment for their trades as well as safety training for these trades, the purchasers and the public at large. "As a company we take corporate responsibility for maintaining a clean construction site and being good neighbours to the residents of the city of Edmonton," says Imdad.



Block captain profile

Life lessons can spring from any experience, or, for that matter, from any fly-away plastic bag.

When the teenagers who've been in trouble with the law are assigned to Mary-Ann Yost's adopted block and go out with their gloves and garbage grabbers/trash tongs, they're not only doing their court-assigned community service, but they're learning what happens when you litter.

"Once you've picked up garbage, you think twice before you throw a piece down," says Yost, community services work supervisor for the Youth Attendance Centre.

As a business captain with the Capital City Clean Up program, she takes kids assigned community service after committing minor crimes to a north central Edmonton block two or three times a week during the summer.

The program provides bigger lessons too. "Capital City Clean Up is a meaningful way for youth to give back to the community, and it's a way that the community is actually seeing them helping out," she notes.

What makes the experience even better, she says, are the joggers and dog walkers who pause with words of encouragement. "The people in that neighbourhood are actually stopping and saying thank you," says Yost.

"I think that the kids realize that they have committed an offence and they need to give back to society, and this is a good way to do that. And it just reinforces it when people of the community acknowledge their contributions."

Mark Your Calendars ...

Edmonton city council will host a luncheon for Capital City Clean Up's business block captains, program partners and community associations on Monday, August 27th at City Hall. Invitations to follow.