City purchases reusable tote bags

From left, Rachael Tompkins, Stephanie Malench and Mayor Hal Patton show off new reusable bags purchased by the city, and which will be given out to residents.

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EDITOR'S NOTE – Due to an error, this story was inadvertently replaced by another on the front page of Wednesday's Intelligencer. Here is the correct story. The Intelligencer apologizes to its readers.

EDWARDSVILLE — One-thousand reusable bags are ready to go out into the community, thanks to the efforts of local politicians and passionate activists who aim to eliminate plastic bags from the Edwardsville and Glen Carbon area.

At a brief presentation at last week’s Rotary Club meeting, Mayor Hal Patton showed off the new design, which will be available at City Hall. For the city, this is the second order of the bags (the first set proved popular, and supplies ran out) which will be given out free of charge. The bags will also be available at community events, such as the Goshen Market.

“We had gotten bags from the city before that were a different style, they were orange, and we gave all of them out at Goshen Market and places like that, and we wanted more,” Stephanie Malench, who is heading up the grassroots group Bring Your Own Glen-Ed, said.

Malench has ambitions far beyond just distributing bags. She wants to see plastic bags eliminated from the Edwardsville market.

“Plastic bags are just the easiest thing to get rid of, because they weren’t invented until the 1970s,” she said. “So there’s no reason to use plastic bags. Especially with all the petroleum shortages we have. There are better things we can use the petroleum for than plastic bags.”

Malench cited other reasons plastic bags are an environmental problem and a nuisance. She said the bags, which do not biodegrade, and slowly break down if they find their way into the environment, where they can impact the food chain.

“Plastics just break into smaller pieces, and when they get out into the waterways they are mistaken by fish for food,” she said. “Their stomachs fill up with plastic, and they die of starvation.”

The bags are also an aesthetic issue, cluttering the landscape, and have a tendency to clog storm drains and get sucked into equipment, she said.

Malench, whose group had initially proposed a ban on plastic bags, decided the measure was too drastic, and is instead pushing city officials to adopt an ordinance which would put a five to 10 cent fee on each plastic bag purchased. They are currently collecting signatures to encourage city officials to pass an ordinance implementing a fee.

“We would be the first (community) in the St. Louis area (with such an ordinance), and there are other communities that are watching us to see how successful we are,” Malench said.