

Beardstown Cleanup Campaign: Cleanup Streets of Beardstown

The City of Beardstown needs a revitalization of its aesthetic appearance. There are many things about Beardstown that catch the eye and pull you in like the historical structures and river walk, but there are just as many eyesores. Downtown you can see the beautiful flowers and plants added in front of the Lincoln Courthouse by their organization and most of the businesses around the square do a great job at keeping up their looks to attract customers. However, many of the areas in between go unchecked and either fall into disrepair and get taken over by unwanted vegetation. It is no one persons fault, but when the community accepts a certain area of town as a failure or loss it gives a false impression of how many people judge their neighbors and the foresight of the leaders in town who guide the future development in Beardstown.

The growing trend of individualism with Internet capable smart phones and divisions that come with the multitudes of cultures in Beardstown combined with drastic age ranges of people who openly participate in community development is growing a perfect storm of indifference. You see less and less of personal responsibility in people around Beardstown and more of a sense of entitlement or exceptionalism when it comes to making our town as beautiful as it can be.

It is easy to call the city and make them clean up a lot of land that has no use at this time, or just drive past it daily and do nothing. Don't get me wrong; I am guilty of this attitude as much as anyone. I would never consider myself lazy, but making time for people I hardly know and will never think me for a job that no one wants to do can be daunting. My mind changes to get motivated when I see from my window kids roaming around at night downtown that have nothing to do with their energy. In my experience that can be positive if they are directed in a direction that is creative and contributes to society, but more often than not, they will end up adding to the graffiti and add to the junk and litter on the street out of boredom. It is easy for the wayward fringe of the current generation to not have a sense of community with the variety of negative information that they are given. Kids in a rural town are told that they can get out of town to get a chance at a good life, or stay in town and lose out on the experiences of life. I know for a fact because I was one of those kids. What the naysayers won't tell you eventually all humans want a place to belong, feel safe and grow as a person. A home, a neighborhood and a community where they feel protected, appreciated and proud to be in the place they call home. That place can be anywhere in the United States, but that place can most certainly be Beardstown.

I'd like to educate the community with what I am doing as an AmeriCorps*VISTA volunteer through the Illinois Institute for Rural Affairs by showing that with a few people who have a few hours to give can make a visible difference. I do not want to be unreasonable and say that buildings that are decaying should be torn down, but people that may not have the capabilities to keep up their yard and don't have a friendly neighbor to help can ask a volunteer to do so. Volunteers can walk around and pick up litter and pull weeds out of the sidewalk. Volunteers can take a can of donated paint and clean up the sea wall and graffiti on abandoned structures. Broken windows can be boarded up on abandoned buildings with donated supplies. A group of students or able bodied helpers can sweep tree limbs, leaves and tree debris in front of a neighbors or strangers home. *Volunteers can get a bucket of reflective paint from the Public Works and re-paint the crosswalks and curbs.*

To keep things tidy in the future enterprising entrepreneurs like Solid Rock Recycling will pick up recyclable items like paper, cardboard, plastic and even some metal on your trash day at no cost for the rest of your life after you pay for the recycling bin. Area Disposal has a similar recycling program that is set up by subscription by July, 1 with a cost of \$18 each billing quarter.

Another effort that could be made is the four wards of town could have a neighborhood trash receptacle that could be emptied by businesses owners who what to step up and do their part. This could take the burden off Public Works to have a city wide clean up every year.

We can pass the hat for some costs, but the people that will want to give their time are more valuable. All of the theoretical ideas to make things look better can be written, but putting it into practice is the only way that it can be done.

So with that said, here is a plan. On May 14 through the 21st AmeriCorps Week is in full swing and it is during this time that I propose that we pick that weekend and use all of the community members and organizations for a Cleanup Streets of Beardstown campaign.

Over the Cinco de Mayo celebration weekend I spoke with some interested people and Illinois Glove Company committed to give gloves to 20 volunteers for the cleanup. The Beardstown Park District will give some of their vandal removal spray to help out. The first organizations to step forward (over the historical capture of Osama Bin Laden weekend) include the Houston Memorial Library, Cass County Star Gazette, Beardstown Charter School Learning Academy, and Randy West from WRMS Radio Broadcasting & LB Sports Productions. It is my hope that many, many more will sign-up this week.

The time and date will be the weekend of May 20th at 10AM the morning, and the 21st in the afternoon. With a group of concerned leaders we will plan the areas that will be cleaned up. The Chamber of Commerce will take appointments for a two hour clean up starting on May 9th on a first come-first-serve basis since there will only be a few volunteers to chip away at the places that need cleaned up.

If you want to volunteer or donate your cleanup supplies please email me @ ajtebrinke@yahoo.com or call 217.883.0639 for Aaron. You can also contact Janice at the Chamber of Commerce at 217.323.3271 and info@beardstownil.org. You can also contact the newspaper at stragazette@casscomm.com, www.bearstownnewspapers.com, 217.323.1010 or 866.320.0140.

Thank you!

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MAPPING the Future of Your Community program