7,000 may help clean up BR litter

By BOB ANDERSON
Environmental editor

More than 6,000 people in the Baton Rouge area will don gloves, grab trash bags and spend part of March 25 picking up trash along road sides and streams, John Hightower predicts.

Local industries plan to get involved, so the number may break 7,000 this year, said Hightower, executive coordinator of Keep America Beautiful in Baton Rouge.

Participating groups have a chance to win several $100 prizes, but the real payoff is to the community as a whole, according to Hightower.

The way a city looks affects its growth, Hightower said.

"Litter is a deterrent to economic development," he said.

Hightower said Louisiana and much of the Gulf Coast has a litter problem: "We look trashy."

But he sees progress.

Over the last decade, litter on Baton Rouge streets dropped 21 percent, according to a scientific survey last year.

Litter in parking lots decreased 80 percent, and litter in vacant lots was reduced by 79 percent, according to the survey.

Unfortunately, some businesses aren't doing as well as individuals, Hightower said.

The same survey also showed a 34 percent increase in litter around commercial refuse points and a 96 percent jump in litter in loading dock areas.

Much of the progress that is being made comes from younger people, Hightower said.

Anti-litter programs in the news media and in schools have been effective, he said.

"We're seeing a generation of more litter-conscious people," he added.

Not only are they less likely to throw trash out of car windows, but they also care enough about how their area looks to get out on a Saturday and pick up the litter of less thoughtful people, he said.

Many of the people who volunteer to help in the Great Trash Bash each year are part of scout troops or school organizations, Hightower said.

During last year's Great Trash Bash, more than 6,100 volunteers picked up 75,000 pounds of trash in the Baton Rouge area, Keep America Beautiful reported.

About 8,280 pounds of recyclable materials also were collected, according to the organization.