Anti-litter campaign announced

Florida parishes bureau

AMITE — Municipal and parish officials announced a crackdown on littering in Tangipahoa Parish at a courthouse meeting Wednesday.

“We are going to strictly enforce the state laws with citations written like traffic tickets,” said Sheriff Ed Layrisson. Deputies have been informed to write all drivers tickets no matter who in their vehicle might have thrown the litter, and that goes for the driver or a boat.

“We feel new teeth in the state law will be a deterrent on littering and dumping,” the sheriff said. “The district attorney says if we identify the sources they will be prosecuted. We’re also doing educational programs in the school system to change the habits of people.”

“If people see somebody littering they should write down the license number and call us or come make a complaint,” Amite Police Chief J.C. Ricks said.

“People who turn somebody in don’t have any exposure,” Layrisson said. “They can’t be charged with false arrest. They might have to testify in court in some cases.”

Signs on utility poles and in road rights of way are considered litter, said Erwin Jenkins, chairman of the Parish Council.

“Any back road with no houses around has become a landfill,” said Carlo Bruno, a parish councilman.

“You can go across the line to Mississippi and see the difference,” said Councilman R.D. Watson. “Cross back to Louisiana and it’s a dumping ground.”

“The No. 1 criticism of tourists is litter,” said Betty Steward, director of the parish Tourist Commission.

“Once you’ve convicted I don’t think you’ll do it again,” said Parish President Gordon Burgess in urging citizens to turn in litter-bugs.

“We know the judges will cooperate on community service sentences,” the sheriff said. “That will put people who are part of the problem into the solution.”

Jail trustees under the supervision of a parish sanitation department employee, who has been commissioned as a deputy sheriff, will be collecting trash from roadsides and looking for evidence, Burgess said.

“The law enforcement and court system in the parish will be hard on littering. We’ve all agreed to it,” Layrisson said.

New legislation sets first-offense fines of from $100 to $750. The penalty for a second offense is suspension of a driver’s license for 30 days and a fine of from $300 to $1,500. A third conviction could result in suspension of a driving license for a year, up to six months in jail and a fine of between $500 and $3,000.