Litterbugs are being squashed on Grove streets

BY DAVID PINES

While Coconut Grove is experiencing a Renaissance in culture, she is also undergoing a make-over.

Recently, a group of volunteers from Benefit Miami at Florida International University took time out of their weekend to pick up trash along Virginia and Mathilda Avenues as part of a city-wide effort to clean up Miami.

"It is everybody’s responsibility to pick up trash, especially after there is heavy traffic on the weekends," said Haydee Regueyra, administrator for the Northeast Coconut Grove Neighbors Office. "We understand that trash is a problem here in the Grove. This is why we have the solid waste department make garbage pickups twice a week on Tuesday and Friday to service trash receptacles placed by our association."

Regueyra maintains that a joint effort from neighbors is necessary to combat the problem.

"People just don’t care and new developments and new rentals just make our job harder," she said. "The city is here to please, but it takes a partnership with the people of the village to really make a difference. In order to enforce this issue, we need to first identify the source."

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Regueyra says "No Dumping" signs and fines often are ignored, as people create trash piles in front of their houses for yard clippings and debris, knowing full well that they are responsible for maintaining all of their property, including the swales.

"Grovites pay for the right to have the city pick up their garbage, but they need to know the code and the system," said Regueyra. "There are no clean-up dates on the weekends, but our automated one-man bandit truck empties the green trash receptacles on Fridays. They have no weight limit, so you can put anything you want in them up to 50 pounds. We can eliminate a lot in one year’s time until there is nothing left on the swale."

Dennis Wheeler, director of the NET program, is heading up an environmental group of three police officers and a code enforcement inspector to crack down on violators.

"This is part of the mayor’s initiative to clean up Miami," said Wheeler. "Mayor Manny Diaz directed the city manager and his staff to come up with new and innovative ways to educate people and stop violators from illegally dumping in the city. Once our task force gets a tip, we will vigorously pursue prosecuting violators in concert with the state attorney’s office. We are already seeing success with the program as we have just arrested a commercial violator and impounded his truck."

Students like Henry Fernandez are part of the solution in combating litterbugs as a member of Dr. Bob Hogner’s service learning class at FIU.

"In an effort to be part of the community, we have adopted Peacock Park, the sailing club, Kenneth Myers Park, the Seminole Boat Ramp and wherever else the NET has needed," said Fernandez. "We are now creating websites to better organize and find people to help lead us at cba.FIU.edu/service."