

River Clean-up volunteers find 8,000 pounds of trash

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When Mai Hashimoto was asked what she had found around the area of High Bridge Park on Saturday, she proudly opened up her sack like a little girl. Then she showed off her spoils from a night of trick-or-treating on Halloween. But there was no candy in her bag. It was filled with discarded cans and pieces of broken bottles.

She was part of the Friends of the Falls fifth annual River Clean-up project, one of approximately 750 people joining together to help improve a park which is mostly hidden from everyday life in Spokane.

This year, the clean-up project picked up around 8,000 pounds of trash, which is a half a ton less than last year.

"I actually think that's good news," said Steve Faust, executive director of Friends of the Falls, who added that perhaps more people are aware of the park and littering less.

The project has grown during the last five years. The first year around 150 people came to pitch in, and this year's number of 750 volunteers tops last year by about 100.

Faust said that he hopes to someday bring the event to other places along the river, maybe in the Valley or near Mission Park, but he feels the most important part of the program is the welcoming ceremony before the clean-up starts.

He feels that when everyone is gathered in one place, they can look around and see how many people care and feel like they are a part of a community looking to make change.

"We think there is a lot of value in that," he said.

The event included prizes for the most interesting trash collected. Faust said that one of the prizes was awarded to some folks who found a piece of a car from the 1920s. A tree was growing through the car, so they could only pull parts from it.

Other interesting items included the remains of a neon sign and a warped 45-speed Gary Glitter record.

Faust said that some of the more interesting items were taken for art projects at Spokane Community College.

He also said that maybe next year the event will include what he called a "Chucky Category," since many volunteers came back with scary-looking plastic dolls.

Many of the people at the event were there for different reasons, and most of them either took the bus or rode their bikes.

Vin Bumpus and her daughter, Debbie Goodrich, were there for their third year because they are involved in Geocaching, a treasure hunt that uses global positioning units to find little prizes in parks.

One of the values of Geocaching is to clean up the areas where they hunt for their prizes.

"When we go treasure-hunting, we always have to take bags," Goodrich said.

Kevin Zec was pitching in for his second year since he's part of the Environmental Law Caucus at Gonzaga University.

He said he found the remains of a place where someone had been camping or living, but he said the state of the area



Ed Drouin watches his wife Deb Drouin relax on an office chair she found while at the Spokane fifth annual River Clean-up. The Spokesman-Review (INGRID BARRENTINE The Spokesman-Review)

wasn't all that bad.

"Last year there was more trash than this year," Zec said.

Chris Dudley was participating for the first year.

She said she found some pornographic stories someone had handwritten, wadded up and left in the park.

She was also in the group that found a homemade toilet and some pillows and blankets.

"I thought I'd like to try something bigger than me," Dudley said about why she was volunteering.

Clean-up activities included recycling, and the trash team from the Unitarian Universalist Church was there to separate cardboard, glass and aluminum.

Sharon Reynolds, a nurse practitioner, was available to collect medical waste, such as syringes, that would later be incinerated by American Medical Response.

"There is a lot less this year than in previous years," Reynolds said.

Toward the end of the clean up, she said she only had collected around 25 syringes.

Kendall Yards, Avista Utilities and Washington Trust Bank helped sponsor the event. STA provided 300 bus passes for those who took the city bus to the park.

"Having STA on board as a partner is a big help," Faust said. "It's just so awesome that people want to turn out for this."