

City Nuisance Complaints...

Solved By Shenandoah

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Three years ago city officials in the Southwest Iowa town of Shenandoah were receiving 40 nuisance property complaints per week. With a strong commitment of local elected officials and advice from the city attorney and the county magistrate, the Shenandoah City Council adopted a Nuisance Abatement Ordinance and a Municipal Infractions Ordinance. The new ordinances helped solicit compliance with city code, altered behavior and created a clean attractive city.

Nuisance complaints can originate from citizen calls to city hall or the police department, patrol officers or observations by city employees and city officials. A police officer is dispatched to the nuisance location and the violation is recorded on a digital camera. The police dispatcher sends a certified letter, with photos, to the owner of record of the property. In the event the nuisance is a junk vehicle the certified letter is sent to tenant. The letter details the location of the violation, cites the code infraction, compliance date, penalty for failure to comply and explains the owner's right to address the city council. It is the belief of the mayor and city council of Shenandoah that a request to abate a public nuisance from the Shenandoah police department will encourage a more positive response because of respect for law enforcement and the average citizens desire to follow a law officer's directive. Failure to comply with the written request citations may be issued that require the violator to pay a fine of up to \$500 for the first offense of up to \$750 for repeat offenses or 30 days in jail.

The nuisance abatement and municipal infractions process cut the number of complaints in half and gave the citizens a more attractive community to live.

Keep Iowa Beautiful!

By Rand Fisher
President
Iowa Area Development Group

“You only get one chance to make a first impression.” Good personal advice and guess what? It's just as true for your firm, your farm or your factory. It's good advice for your community as well.

I was reminded of this during a recent conversation with Gerald Schnepf, Executive Director of Keep Iowa Beautiful. What a great organization and a great name.

“Keep Iowa Beautiful,” so straight forward, so obvious, so simple. Well, maybe not so simple. Perhaps its more like what Tom Peters says about customer service “If it’s so simple, why doesn’t everyone do it.”

Not so simple indeed. Neat, clean, attractive communities and companies require policies, procedures and programs. They require time and resources. But they have a huge return on investment.

Back to my conversation with Mr. Schnepf, who like a skilled attorney, asked only questions to which I presume he already knew the answers. Gerry asked if in our work at Iowa Area Development Group we observed any correlation between well kept communities and economic development. He also asked me if the companies we work with are concerned about community cleanliness and attractiveness.

The simple answer to the questions is easy, Yes! But Gerry wanted evidence and real life examples he could share. So I gave him a few.

Starting with the positive, I told Gerry about communities who increasingly were recognizing the importance of such things as entryway signing, tree planting, flowers, lighting, etc. I mentioned that many of the Iowa communities who have participated in the Iowa Main Streets program are now particularly alert to cleanliness and good design as essential elements of a comprehensive approach to economic vitality.

Unfortunately, I had to tell him about other communities who seem to have lost their pride and even their backbone when it comes to encouragement and enforcement of simple matters intended to protect property values and provide for public safety and health. When it comes to spending some money or going to the mat some council members and supervisors are more interested in keeping their jobs than doing their jobs.

Whether you’re promoting your town for new industry, trying to encourage a stronger service and retail sector, or working hard to be a good bedroom community, keeping your town neat and clean is job one. No Iowa community is too big, too little, too old or too poor to neglect the importance of these matters.

Do visitors and potential investors care? The companies we work with sure do. Many of the enterprises we work with will be or already are among the city and county’s largest taxpayers. They have multi-million dollar investments. I was able to tell Mr. Schnepf about numerous companies who were adamantly concerned about community appearance and the long term value of their potential investment. Today companies are increasingly concerned about their public image. They want visitors, vendors, workers and others to be impressed not only by their facility, but by the neighborhood as well.

To presume that clean places, beautiful places, attractive and inviting places just happen is wrong headed. Working together Iowans can make both our public property and private property cleaner, safer and more attractive. We can create environments more attractive to investment and economic development.

Keep Iowa Beautiful (KIB) is affiliated with a national program called Keep America Beautiful. The organization is devoted to addressing the issues of littering and illegal dumping in our state and is working to promote beautification of our state and its communities. Check out their web site at www.keepiowabeautiful.com.

Iowa State Fair...

Cleanest in the Nation

Attend the 2003 Iowa State Fair and help Keep Iowa Beautiful. For the third year KIB will have a booth in the new air conditioned Varied Industries Building. Last year nearly 10,000 fair goers stopped by the booth to learn how they could help Keep Iowa Beautiful.

This year we again need your help to staff the booth. The booth is open August 7-17 from 9 to 9. Plan a day at the fair with friends from your community and volunteer a few hours in the KIB booth in air conditioned comfort. KIB will provide you with general admission to the fair and a free T-shirt.

For more information on how to sign up, please call or e-mail Keep Iowa Beautiful.

Litter Enforcement...

Award Winners Announced

First Award Presentation was made on March 10, 2003

Front row L-R: Lt. Steve Loftus, District Commander, Karla & Maranda Bohlmann, Sgt. Dan Schaffer all of Denison. Back row (partially hidden) John Schneller and KIB Chairman Don Lamberti.

Two inaugural "Litter Enforcement Award" winners have been announced by KIB. The awards were established to recognize those enforcement officers that are going the "extra mile" in litter prevention and enforcement efforts.

Iowa State Patrol Post 4 – Staff and Families from Denison, Iowa. In addition to enforcement efforts, the staff in recognition of the reopening of the District office adopted a section of Highways 59 / 141 to the north junction of Highways 59 / 141 on January, 2001.

Mr. Laverne Payne – Solid Waste Manager and Mrs. Debbie Yerington – Refuse Collection Supervisor – City of Muscatine. A problem was occurring with an

increasing amount of unsightly debris and litter in the downtown main street area. They recommended a change to the city ordinances and spent considerable “after hours” time to increase public awareness to the new ordinance and to confiscate illegally placed litter, garbage bags and trash.

The program was established through the generosity of John and Judy Schneller of Des Moines. Award winners received framed certificates and the winners can designate a litter prevention, cleanup and / or beautification effort that will receive a \$1,000 cash award in their name.

New KIB Affiliate...

Keep Fort Dodge Beautiful

The Community Action Network Steering Committee in Fort Dodge has decided to establish and support a “Keep Fort Dodge Beautiful” program. The program will focus on litter reduction, litter prevention and awareness, and community beautification. KFDB will begin meeting this summer to develop a comprehensive and multi-year plan. Keep Fort Dodge Beautiful becomes the 16th KIB affiliate.

Litter Free...

Girls’ Basketball Tourney

The Iowa Girls High School Athletic Union and Keep Iowa Beautiful in conjunction with Artistic Waste Services joined together to help make the Girls Basketball Tournament “Litter Free”. Cleaning up event litter is costly and can be avoided. It is one simple and easy way to reduce school expenses.

The Iowa Girls High School Athletic Union recognizes the importance of helping to change this type of behavior pattern. Troy Dannen the Executive Director has said, “We focus heavily on the development of a sportsman like ethic with all school participants, it is a logical extension that the concept of sportsmanship should also embrace treating the facilities we play in with respect – in essence to leave them in the condition we find them in. Encouraging both the participants and the fans not to litter and show respect and pride for the facilities we perform in is a key element of ‘being a sport’.

Don Lamberti, the Chair of Keep Iowa Beautiful feels that “Building pride in where we live, work and play is an essential ingredient to our quality of life. Providing clean and attractive communities is important to economic growth in our State. Today’s youth – the girls playing ball in the tournament and also the spectators can help by not littering and by getting involved in making their communities clean and attractive places. Everyone

with little effort can help to Keep Iowa Beautiful”.

A new twist on an old tradition happened on the final night when the basketball court was swept clean by a tuxedo team. Only this year it was by the board of directors of Keep Iowa Beautiful.