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Trash Talk

By Rich Sloane
UCF Forum columnist
Wednesday, October 23, 2013

As they say in the sports world, I'm "talking trash."

Here are some statistics with which you can easily win a bar bet. UCF generates 2,342 tons of solid waste annually that is sent to the landfill. On average, each of us generates about 4.5 pounds of solid waste per day.

And perhaps most importantly, people hold a piece of trash 12 paces – before they litter.

While UCF has one of the most attractive, well maintained, user-friendly campuses in the nation, we have a litter problem. It's not a question of the university's Facilities Operations and Landscape and Natural Resources departments; they do a fantastic job of keeping the grounds and buildings in tip-top shape, inside and out. You'll find the staff constantly cruising the campus with barrels and bags, picker-uppers and brooms, mops and all manner of implements, gathering wayward newsprint, candy wrappers, soda cans and on Monday mornings the occasional adult beverage container.

What we have here is a case of neglect. Too many people neglect to pick up after themselves. It always baffles me as to who would set down a banana peel on the ledge of the stairwell in a parking garage. I mean, I love bananas. I'm even told that in the '60s some folks used to scrape the inside of the skin and smoke the residue. Only heard about it; didn't inhale.

The campus newspaper is a great voice, but when it becomes blowing trash it's just that, blowing trash.

And Styrofoam cups left half full of suspicious brown liquid? I mean, come on folks; either drink up or put up. Put up in the can, that is. And don't get me started on gum. Did you ever notice the little black spots on the concrete throughout the campus, the

remnants of chewing gum that lost its flavor on the deck instead of the bedpost overnight?

The fact that UCF is a smoke-free campus constitutes two steps in the right direction. First, because of the health issues inherent in smoking. Secondly, because cigarette butts were about to be classified as the 11th plague of the ancients prior to the upsurge in anti-smoking policies. As someone who once emptied his car ashtray on the ground in any convenient parking lot, today I speak with clarity on the matter of those who “Bogart that butt,” having given up the vice some time ago.

All of this leads me to my grand plan for transforming the way we keep our house. That’s the term our student-athletes use when encouraging the crowd to get behind them at the game: “This is our house! C’mon now!”

It’s not something new; it’s been tried elsewhere before. But if we get behind it you’ll see a difference.

In a nutshell, the plan is to have everyone on campus bend over and pick up one piece of wayward trash every day. That’s right – one person, one piece. Every day. Just think; 60,000 students, 10,000 employees. That’s 70,000 pieces of trash getting the respect they deserve each and every day.

The plan is called “Operation Ben Dover,” named after that great American, Ben Dover, who a half century ago bent over to pick up the aforementioned banana peel just prior to the president entering New York’s Waldorf Astoria Hotel, and thus averting what might have been a serious presidential slip. Now 70,000 people are not on the campus every day, but a sizable number are. And if each did his or her part and would “Ben Dover” it would have a significant impact on the appearance of our house.

So my plea and hope is that all who call UCF home will bend over each day and scoop up (at least) one piece of trash and put it in its rightful place. The exercise benefits alone warrant the effort

All together now, on the count of three: Bend and stoop, and bend and scoop...

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