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28 Years of Good, Clean Fun

By Ann Davey Masters

At Roanoke's Clean Valley Council, we start good things. This is a philosophy to live by—start something good and it may continue with you or be adopted. The Clean Valley Council is in the Jefferson Center in Roanoke, Virginia, a former Roanoke high school. So much about this place is familiar to me. I walked these halls in penny loafers when it was my high school. There were no carpeted hallways then, and I can still picture the locker-lined walls. In the last ten years it has been “recycled” into a home for 19 not for profit agencies, from police cadets to the Roanoke Symphony.

We share our north third floor hallway with CASA and the Junior League of Roanoke Valley. Our windows are up near the top of the 100 year oak trees and we are treated with a rarefied view of Tinker Mountain, above Hollins University, on a flight pattern of the regional airport, as well as the spires of St. Andrews Catholic Church. We are right in the center of the city. All of these sights and sounds are inspiration.

The mixture of missions in this building is good. Many of the agencies share common goals of serving, teaching, advocacy and stewardship. On some days we are treated to music coming from the Shaftman Auditorium across the hall. As I was working one day I thought I heard Joan Baez singing. She was. It is a stimulating, creative place to work.



Spring 2004 CVC cleanup program was a success.

IN THE BEGINNING

In 1978, private citizens of the greater Roanoke Valley established Clean Valley (Committee) Council to be an agency to raise awareness about litter prevention. This organization was created for the betterment of the Roanoke Valley. A cleaner and healthier environment was the simple goal. The health component could not have more important then as it is in today's technology. The Clean Valley Council is a community investment. It is what happens when people dream. As one-way containers became part of our world, litter became a larger problem. The mission changed into appropriate waste management and recycling was also addressed.

The council (a nongovernmental, nonprofit agency) serves the five governments of Botetourt County, city of Roanoke, Roanoke County, city of Salem and the town of Vinton with free outreach environmental education. It is governed by a 19-member board of directors from across the valley. It is so nice to be asked if there is room for a new member on the board. This is a very productive and passionate group of volunteers. One week, they might will be handling a river clean up and working information for electronic waste collection the next. A lot of our success is due to the partnerships we enjoy with the local governments, the Department of Environmental Quality, the Roanoke Valley Resource Authority, VDOT, regional businesses, private sector donors, volunteers and educational facilities.

We are afforded a freedom of purpose by being a nongovernmental agency. Volunteers are Clean Valley's currency; a proven value in any community. The number for just one clean up event in the spring of 2006 was over 1,700 volunteers.

EDUCATION'S GROCERY LIST

It sounds simple. Our outreach is K—12, and free to the public and private school systems. Outreach may literally change with the weather. When there is a drought, we have a greater opportunity to focus more on water conservation. If one is to be a good steward with the environment you teach how to live within the environment. Since only one percent of the water on earth is useful to us as all else is frozen or saline, it seems prudent to conserve it. Of course, heavy rains can create yet another program about stormwater run off and the litter it sends into the nearest stream or river.

Education begins with the student outreach. Adult education is through public service announcements, action events like clean ups or recycling and civic meetings.

Over the years, at Clean Valley we have taught by example with our partners. Cycle Systems and Clean Valley and collected over 30,000 used textbooks. Sorting them by class and school, we boxed and sent them to the schools in Kenya via AMERICARE. The Books for Africa project educated donors and made young friends in Africa. The council hears occasionally from someone who finds our address stamped in the front cover of these textbooks. It has to be one of the council's most labor intensive projects. Sorting had to be in any dry spaces we could find such as borrowed warehouses and extra spaces in the Virginia Museum of Transportation. We used the Sheriff's lesser offenders; church volunteers and friends to sort. It took a massive amount of time. We dusted, sorted, checked for photographs, money (people use amazing things for bookmarks), love letters, and then stamped Books for Africa and our city and address and boxed and then boxed them up for shipping.

Take It or Leave It was a favorite program. It was a free flea market where unwanted items that could be used again were not thrown away but given away, thus avoiding the landfill. You could literally take it or leave it. People got office chairs, household furniture, sporting equipment, books, and things we had never considered. Earth Summit for juniors and seniors is a rewarding event. It is a congress for teens representing all of the valley's high schools. It is a day filled with presentations and environmental workshops for youth who are fast becoming voters, decision makers and consumers. Workshop offerings are storm drain stenciling, sculpture of found objects, Good Will Hunting on a Rescue Mission that is recycled clothing and a runway show. We see a lot of like-minded adults on the back row. A recent summit's theme was Choosing a Better Way. It is about healthy products, environmentally sound practices and rethinking how we do things. Rethinking how we may conserve and why it is key in our lives. It is choosing the better way. The time could not be better. We show the youth they are in charge of making the good decision. They learn about vegetated roofs, solar panels, cleaner air, pure water and healthy food grown in the area. There is a one hundred mile diet that is made up of food grown within 100 miles.



This is what a truckload of river trash looks like from a 2005 cleanup campaign.

A RIVER RUNS

Clean ups will always be part of the Clean Valley Council. I promise you the first sign of spring is not the robin but the orange litter bag. The fall waterway clean up is growing by leaps and partners. The only problem is avoiding the regional football home games. The waterway clean up has grown into a picnic and music event to celebrate cleaner streams and rivers. Roanoke Valley has two watersheds: the James River in Botetourt racing to the Chesapeake Bay and the Roanoke River slowly ambling across state lines to the Albemarle Sound in North Carolina.

The outreach for schools is an ongoing project. Our 600 square foot office is filled with activity that time of the year. Of the four of us in the office, Linda Barker and Beth Walton are educators getting ready for school openings and the other is our most amazing assistant, Norma Kinnick. Together we have taken on a new project of nonpoint source pollution of storm water runoff for Roanoke County, Roanoke City and the town of Vinton.

If you are to teach a better way of living it has to make sense and be fun. If you can convince young people it's a good idea, they will teach their parents.

STARTING GOOD THINGS

Our history with the Junior League of Roanoke Valley was the first Household Hazardous Waste Collection Day (morning actually) in the valley more than 11 years ago. The large response was not expected. It is now presented by all of the governments and offered often, but we are still there on the car line with smiles, information and presence.

Within the last year, the Clean Valley Council rolled out a Green Construction Site Manual for builders, architects and homeowners. We were invited to do this for the C2C Homes project here in Roanoke in the fall of 2006. I seem to remember, architect, Gregg Lewis saying to us, "Wouldn't it be fun to ... ?" It was a ton of work and it is a stand alone resource manual for green building. The researcher and author for the project is consultant Laura Wasko. She was hired as a private environmental consultant. The manual has been honored by the Virginia Petroleum Council and the Commonwealth of Virginia with the annual Stewardship Award in communications. Wow, what a nice surprise. By the way, yes, Gregg, it was fun. We now know, as a byproduct of the research, where most of the healthy products can be acquired in the greater Roanoke Valley.

Approximately 100 green construction site manuals have been distributed for only the cost of the printing to the future builders of C2C Homes, architects, builders, and private homeowners. The manual information is unique for this area. Green building is growing because it is sustainable, beautiful and healthy. It is a choice for living. The home is a shelter, a haven, protection, an abode, domicile, sanctuary and a safe harbor for living. Should it not be a place for a good healthy life for many families to come?

DREAMS AND HOPES

Our hopes and dreams? What if we get it right and are able to close our doors, maybe? What if we find new and innovative ways to learn and teach? What if we continue the challenge and are a source of information of new ideas and values? What if we help lighten our footprints on the earth for all living creatures? What if we realize we can only do our part for this region, not the whole earth? When Robert Fulghum said in All I Ever Needed to Know I Learned in Kindergarten ... what if all the nations in the world cleaned up their own messes ... What if?



The author is the executive director of the Clean Valley Council based in Roanoke, VA.

For more information:

Ann Masters

Executive Director, Clean Valley Council, Inc.
541 Luck Ave. • Roanoke, VA 24016 • (540) 345-5523
ann@CleanValley.org • www.CleanValley.org