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Build some hometown pride!

by CATHERINE STRAWN

A community volunteer day with family and friends can bring you closer and make your neighborhood a nicer place to live. To get started, talk to your city council or the nonprofit Keep America Beautiful (*kab.org*) to figure out how to join or organize one of the activities below.



1 Plant trees and flowers

Help your neighborhood bloom! Your public works department usually needs lots of volunteers around this time of year to plant flowers in parks or around municipal buildings, rake fallen leaves and branches, or replace trees that didn't survive winter winds. Besides making your public spaces more attractive with greenery and plants, you'll also be freeing up city maintenance crews to work on more pressing issues.

3 Gather trash

Don a pair of protective work gloves and sign up to collect rubbish in a designated spot, like a local park or main street. By filling up a few garbage bags, you're not only tidying up the area, your action can also stop the cycle of littering: When people see one bit of trash on the ground, they tend to dump more. Plus, picking up around town may help alleviate the \$11.5 billion the United States spends on litter cleanup each year.

2 Remove graffiti

When vandals deface a wall or a sidewalk, it costs local government and business owners big bucks to clean, and can also discourage other businesses from investing in the area. Jot down locations that you've noticed, then alert your public works department. You could also enlist a local artist to outline a mural on the defaced surface, then have volunteers fill in the design.

4 Maintain storm drains

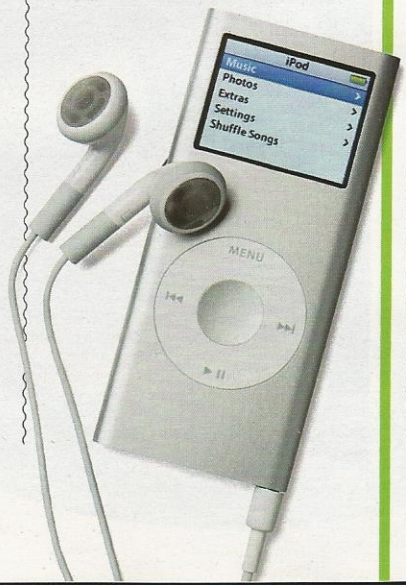
The debris and pollution that go down street gutters flow directly into natural waterways, and can cause clogs and flooding on roads. Check the metal grates on your local streets and free them of any debris, such as leaves and litter. If you don't see a "no dumping" marker on each storm drain, ask your mayor or city council about putting them in place.

SOURCES: Roberta Herr, councilwoman, town of Holland, NY. Julia Hillegass, public information and community affairs administrator, Hampton Roads Planning District Commission (*askHRgreen.org*). Neal Roop, mayor, town of New Windsor, MD.

TWO-MINUTE DO-GOODER



By donating your old iPod to the nonprofit Music & Memory, you can help someone struggling with Alzheimer's or other cognitive and physical challenges listen to her favorite tunes. Hearing the familiar music brightens her day, and even helps trigger memories. For donation information, go to musicandmemory.org



CHEERFUL CARDS FOR KIDS In honor of its 100th birthday, Wells (the makers of Blue Bunny ice cream) has pledged to help the Make-A-Wish Foundation grant 100 wishes to children with life-threatening conditions. Go to 100years100wishes.com to add your name and a short message to a virtual "wish card" that will be delivered to all 100 kids.