



BAG IT WITH BECKERS!

By Xenya Cherny

Environmental protection at the global scale often starts with individual action. One of the unique things about the Clean Up the World campaign is that it brings together large organisations and small communities alike in a joint effort to make our planet a cleaner and healthier place. This is a story about an American family of three that has been walking the environmental talk in their business, community service and everyday life.

The Beckers started their family business as realtors working across Portland metropolitan area in the northwest US state of Oregon. As they travelled the region, Don, Vicki, and Jo Becker saw many changes over the years in the communities they served. Sadly, one of these was rubbish accumulating on the roadsides, in the waterways, and on the shores of the nearby Henry Hagg Lake, a spot the family had frequented over the years.

In 1996, the Beckers decided that they could do more than just sit and watch their community get dirtier and grubbier every day. Together with the local environment group SOLV and the Oregon State Marine Board, they "adopted" a section of shoreline at Henry Hagg Lake, which is home to rainbow trout, small mouth bass, brown bullhead, and yellow perch, as part of Adopt-A-River programme.

The programme, launched in the 1980s, encourages volunteers across the United States to "adopt" a section of a lake, river, wetland or ravine to ensure its long-term health through annual clean ups.

"At first, clean ups were simply a 'family affair.' We wanted to give back to the community we served and engage in meaningful stewardship efforts," says Jo, the daughter of the Becker family.

The 1998 clean up was the first to be held under the Clean Up the World banner. "Tying our event to Clean Up the World, an international program,

has given our 'small family function' greater clout and meaning," she says.

The family also practiced what they preached in their business by creatively recycling paper and including environmental tips in their client mailings.

Gradually, the Beckers succeeded in involving the wider community in their activities by inviting clients, colleagues, neighbours and the public via the local media to join them during the annual Clean Up the World weekends.

The family trio rounded up volunteers from across the Portland area to focus their efforts on debris removal along the lakeshore, the clean up operation advertised as "Bag It with Beckers!".



A small army of volunteers joined the Beckers to clean up the lakeshore of Henry Hagg Lake in last year's campaign

"During our inaugural event we hosted a couple of dozen volunteers. The second year we doubled our RSVPs, but it rained on the day and the same number of people – about two dozen – turned up," Jo recalls.

"In previous years we haven't weighed or otherwise measured the

trash we had collected. But as last year's volunteers turned in bag after bag of discarded refuse, I couldn't help reflecting on the tremendous difference a group of volunteers can make compared with the small amount of rubbish one or two of us can collect on our own!," she admits.

The Beckers expect that some 50 people will participate in this year's Clean Up the World weekend. Complimentary activities scheduled for the day include awareness-raising workshops on renewable energy, native vegetation and edible mushrooms, recycling tips and other topics.

After retiring from their business last year, the Beckers continue the family's involvement in the Clean Up the World campaign. "We are proud to be involved in a programme that has such an impact on our shared environment, our connected economies and our collective quality of life," says Jo.

And does she think that The Beckers Clean Up project has borne fruit? "I believe I've seen a decrease in debris at Hagg Lake over the years. People seem to recognize when an area is well kept and well cared for, and tend to respect that," she says.

Xenya Cherny is a freelance journalist living and working in Sydney, Australia. This article is available for reproduction free of charge as long as due acknowledgment is given to Clean Up the World Pty Ltd and the author, and the meaning of the article is not changed.

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