

do that would have as great an impact on our city's future as a successful effort to instill these positive values in our children.

### (5) Keeping Clean

If we want our neighborhoods to attract people, they must be clean. It requires a focused effort on graffiti removal, a strong sanitation department, a parks department that keeps the parks and road medians clean, and a codes enforcement effort to ensure that property owners are maintaining their sites. We developed a set of ordinances that allowed us to pursue judicial fines against people who refused to move old cars out of their front yards, or who placed small "snipe" advertising signs illegally in the rights of way throughout the city. Sanitation department employees were responsible for quickly painting over graffiti as it appeared. A team that included police, sanitation, and neighborhood department staff worked together to identify and prosecute those responsible for the graffiti.

Part of the effort also required an aggressive policy against illegal dumping. As of 2001 we had parts of our city, especially in Midtown, where people regularly dumped their old appliances, construction debris, and other trash in vacant lots and alleys. One of the most offensive practices occurs when building contractors drive into our city from other cities to use our neighborhoods as a trash pile so they can avoid having to pay the dumping fee at the county's landfill.

At first, we simply aggressively cleaned up the mess hoping that the cleaner atmosphere would make it less likely that people would dump their trash. But the regular clean ups didn't stop the dumping, so we decided to try another approach. We assigned one of our police detectives to the sanitation department with instructions to go through the dumped trash to identify the violator. We had laws that allowed us both to arrest violators and seize their vehicles.

For a contractor, this is a severe penalty, so I decided to broadcast to the region that we were serious. We held a press conference at a vacant lot where trash had been dumped. The television stations showed me operating a front-end loader and putting trash into a garbage truck. After

ILLEGAL DUMPING

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## RICK BAKER

I picked up a part of the pile, I announced to the cameras that we had assigned a police detective to illegal dumping, and that we would identify those who were putting their trash in our neighborhoods. I described it as an outrageous offense to the community for people to use our neighborhoods as a garbage dump, and I assured everyone that we were serious.

Evidently one contractor didn't believe me. Within days he took a load of building material from a house outside our city and dumped the trash on the same lot where I held the press conference. After our detective identified the contractor, we seized his truck, arrested and fined him, and sent out another press release. The message eventually got out. Between 2003 and 2009, our instances of reported illegal dumping in Midtown dropped by over 86 percent, and the annual amount of trash picked up from Midtown's lots and alleys dropped from 348 to 19 tons, a reduction of 94 percent.

### (6) Trees

April is a beautiful time of year in St. Petersburg. It is still cool much of the time and everything is in bloom: Oleander, Crape Myrtle, Magnolia, Royal Poinciana, and especially the purple Jacaranda trees. The Jacaranda are large trees, some as big as oaks. In the spring the entire tree becomes filled with beautiful bright purple blooms. Although I have never been able to confirm it, I believe that St. Petersburg's women's garden club planted the trees along the major corridors in the city when they worked on the city's last flowering tree program in the 1960s. When my family goes to church on Sundays in April, we try to count how many Jacaranda trees we can spot during the five-mile drive along 38th Avenue North. Typically, we count about forty along the way. On the way home we sometimes travel different routes just so we can see how many more Jacaranda trees we can count! It became a special memory for my young children growing up.

After taking office, I decided that it was time again for the city to implement a flowering tree program. It had been forty years since the last one. We completed an inventory of different types of flowering trees that

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