



Hungry for Cigarette Butts

The most fun sculpture educates and generates money for charity

by Abby Cunningham

San Rafael CA - A late-summer breeze feathered its way through downtown San Rafael as locals meandered on Fourth Street in search of dinner, drinks and maybe a good movie. A woman paused for a moment of quiet reflection, and took a long drag off her cigarette. But instead of snuffing out the butt with the toe of her high-heeled shoe, she walked over to a seven-foot sculpture and stuffed it into the bull's eye.

"Every little bit helps, and I try to do my part," she said.

Cigarette Eater Meter, was commissioned by San Rafael Clean and created by artists Ventana Amico and Enrique Goldenberg. Its goal: to raise awareness about the environmental impacts of the 10,000 cigarette butts that land on San Rafael streets every three to four days.

The metallic sculpture looks something like a giant weighing scale you might find at an amusement park. It is colorfully painted with pictures that show how cigarette butts travel from sidewalk to drain to water systems. Pull-up panels ask thought-provoking questions and give surprising answers.

The sculpture works sort of like a parking meter, except that money comes out and goes to charity. For every butt deposited into the meter, two cents are given to a local charity — St. Vincent de Paul Society. When the dial reaches 100,000 a matching grant will kick in another \$2,000.

Smoking in the streets has been glamorized for decades, particularly in Hollywood films, as a kind of free-spirited gesture of American independence. Today we know that smoking is bad for us, but most of us don't know how harmful cigarette butts are to wildlife and the environment.

What starts out as grimy street litter eventually finds its way into storm drains, creeks and the nearby San Francisco Bay. Cigarette filters are made of a plastic called cellulose acetate that doesn't biodegrade. Birds and fish eat them and eventually starve to death because their stomachs are full of plastic. To make matters worse, one unfiltered cig-

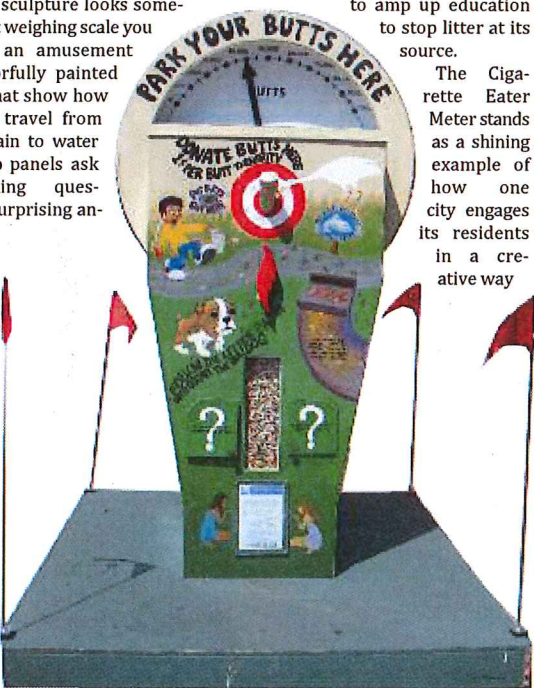
arette butt has the toxicity to kill half of the fish in a one-liter container of water, according to a recent study by San Diego State University.

Fortunately though, the City of San Rafael doesn't sit idly by while all those cigarette butts wash down the drain. Last year, San Rafael Clean, a partnership between various city organizations, as well as local businesses and residents, started a program called "Bounty for Butts."

Diners at the St. Vincent de Paul Society dining room were invited to participate in a "buy-back" program where they received one dollar for every ounce of collected cigarette litter. The program was enormously successful. In the first two weeks alone, participants cleared about 90,000 cigarette butts from the streets while generating much-needed income.

In addition to the clean-up, organizers at San Rafael Clean decided to amp up education to stop litter at its source.

The Cigarette Eater Meter stands as a shining example of how one city engages its residents in a creative way



“Participants received one dollar for every ounce of collected cigarette litter.”

to solve a collective problem. And although some of the Golden State's non-smokers would like to blame those who do, the fact remains that loose cigarette butts are everyone's business, and everyone can do something to help. If you see a loose butt, pop it in the trash. Or better yet, bring a Cigarette Eater Meter to your city. If you want to heal the Earth, the time is now and the place is right beneath your feet.

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Tell me what you think

Connecting with people about climate change the easy way

by Nancy Faulstich

Watsonville, CA - On the last weekend in August, I organized a listening project focusing on climate change. I incorporated what I know about listening and caring about people into this project. I believe we made an impact on hundreds, if not thousands, of people and began connections with many that we will

people more than talking at them. I trusted that listening and staying connected would help each person who talked to us put their attention on climate change at least a little.

The big day

One of my friends was a little skeptical. And, as she watched me talk with people she became more and more intrigued by what I

These actions, which could include talking to others about what they know, were entered into a raffle.

Some people signed up to be on our mailing list.

Meaningful connections

Many people thanked us profusely for being there. We connected with some who were already involved, some who knew a little bit, and those who didn't know much at all.

Here are some conversations which stood out.

An elder from Guanajuato, Mexico who knew a great deal about the changing weather patterns shared his knowledge passionately. I encouraged him to talk to his family and friends about these issues.

A Chicano environmental law student told us about protecting people's



Marina Chicurel (rt) listens to a passerby

“One of my friends was a little skeptical. And as she watched me talk with people, she became more and more intrigued by what I was doing.”

be able to continue in the future.

For a location I chose a local Strawberry Festival—a big family oriented event featuring music, carnival rides, food, and information booths. Strawberries are an enormous crop in this area and most strawberry pickers are migrant Mexican farm workers.

Planning

I recruited five friends to staff an information booth with me, along with my husband and two volunteers from our farm.

My 5-yr-old daughter colored in most of the big signs and in the process showed me how much she has learned about climate change.

I liked the idea of having a presence at a large, mainstream event. This was not an Earth Day or otherwise environmentally-themed event, and I expected it would have a different crowd—much more representative of the whole population of the town and surrounding areas than typically attends “environmental” events.

Because I planned to run the booth like a listening project, I talked with each friend about listening to

was doing.

It seemed to work best to approach people with a general question—in English or Spanish—such as: “What is your favorite place in nature?” Or, “What do you want the world to be like for your children or grandchildren?”

One friend had made a beautiful collage of images from nature. This drew a lot of attention and was also a great conversation starter.

After engaging passers-by in a little conversation around those questions I spoke about the reason for our booth, asking them if they had heard much about climate change.

The event was a great success!

I had expected more people to ignore us, and thought some might be very negative. Instead, we engaged in thoughtful conversations with hundreds of people over the two days. A police officer said there could be 20,000-30,000 people attending the festival. I hadn't realized it was such a huge event.

74 people pledged to take an action that week to help stop climate change.

rights and needs.

A teenager who is exploring shifting to a vegan diet expressed her frustration about environmental concern being called a “hippie” thing by her friends.

An elder said she had decided to stop worrying about ‘all of these kinds of things.’ I listened to her and agreed that just worrying wouldn't help anything and concentrated on having a good, enjoyable interaction with her.

A 30-something-year-old Chicano said he is starting to grow some of his food, plans to build a wind turbine and develop solar power for his house. He is also considering getting chickens, right in downtown Watsonville.

Several people, who stayed engaged in conversation despite disagreement, ended up leaving with a slightly changed attitude.

Children told me about their favorite animals or colored on paper while I talked with their folks.

I'm grateful to my friends who left inspired, with ideas for new actions. I believe we offered people hope as we helped them look at serious issues.