



Swans at Lake Eola in the heart of downtown Orlando.

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# Keeping Orlando the City Beautiful

By Patrick Alcine

With volunteers of all ages, **Keep Orlando Beautiful** aims to educate and motivate all citizens to pitch in to help our environment.

Ever since junior high school, **Jody Goostree** of **downtown Orlando** has made it her mission to leave her city, her state, her planet, better than how she found it. Now, as coordinator of Keep Orlando Beautiful, the city's chapter of Keep America Beautiful headquartered near downtown on Woods Avenue, she's making sure that mission gets accomplished.

"I've always been involved in something having to do with bettering the environment—whether it was Earth Day events at school, my work as a storm water education specialist or the time I spent as the project manager at an environmental lab," Goostree says. "But now I get to focus on really getting people involved in the process."

With a core group of 50 to 100 faithful volunteers, Goostree hopes to get even more accomplished as the organization grows. The group is as diverse as Orlando



itself, from college students and young professionals to elementary-age children and senior citizens.

"Demographically, it's really all ages," Goostree explains. "We even get little ones to participate in our clean-ups. It's anyone from 5 to 60 years old. We'd love to have more young males, but anyone who is physically capable and has the interest, we can use."

Though their approach is multifaceted, educating both the younger and older generations is top priority. "Our aim is to engage individuals and the community at large to take greater responsibility by volunteering in different areas of focus," Goostree says. "Educating people is a major part of that."

## The Environment Is Elementary

The group has initiated many school programs aimed at different age groups. "We have our school environmental club," Goostree says. "We bring information to teachers to distribute to their students." In an amazing display of cooperation and involvement, they were able to reach 5,000 kids last year.

In addition, there are annual activities that give younger people the opportunity to volunteer while raising money and awareness for the cause. "We have our Can It for the Planet event, which is a fundraiser that takes place countywide," Goostree says.

Orlando's Can It for the Planet event usually runs the length of the school year, from October to May. Mostly elementary schools participate, and schools can begin the program any time of the year. "It's so fulfilling to see the response and how into it the kids get," Goostree says. "And they love the event mascot, Can-It Janet. As for adults, we attend neighborhood meetings and workshops—anywhere we can get the word out."

## A Changing Mindscape

It seems the word is indeed getting out. On the forefront of many minds these days are alternative fuels, global warming and how to impact our planet positively. More people are becoming aware of their carbon footprint.

"I've seen a lot of changes in people's attitudes and behaviors in the last year," Goostree says. "It used to be the challenge was getting people to think green at all. It seemed that, if they couldn't see how something affected them, then they weren't concerned. Now the issue is dealing with people who fall victim to green-washing."

Green-washing, by most definitions, is a term for advertising that promotes certain products or services as being less harmful to the environment, without any basis in fact. The effect is that people buy into it, not realizing that they aren't actually doing much to help the environment. The harm is that they then feel as



Jody Goostree and assistant coordinator Melanie Alves work to engage our community in taking responsibility for keeping our city beautiful and clean.

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if they've done their part and aren't motivated to get involved more deeply.

## Cleaning It Up

Still, Keep Orlando Beautiful has not seen any waning in volunteer support for their many beautification projects: lake and street clean-ups, recycling events and tree plantings. "We had our record event in October, the Florida Coastal Clean-Up," Goostree says. "In only two hours, we had 520 volunteers clean-up seven lakes and 7,200 pounds of litter and debris. For me, it was so huge and very rewarding."

And that's what it's all about for Goostree and many of her staff. "It's a really deep satisfaction, feeling like I make a difference," she says. "Inspiring our younger volunteers and fulfilling something I've always been interested in. It's a cliché, but it's true."

As for the future of the organization, Goostree would like to see more focus on the recycling of technology and the reduction of medical waste. "As technology progresses, we'd like to have bigger, farther reaching programs out there, especially for technology waste and medicine," she says. "So many people are doing things like trading their older TVs for flat screens, and it's worrisome. I think people are interested. It's just about getting the resources out there." **L**

Tell a friend about **The Great American Clean-Up** from our Web site at [CentralFlorida-Lifestyle.com](http://CentralFlorida-Lifestyle.com).

## Great American Clean-up

- The next major event for Keep Orlando Beautiful is the Great American Clean-Up, which takes place from **March 1** through **May 31**.
- The Great American Clean-Up is the nation's largest community improvement program and, locally, includes many events and efforts coordinated within communities throughout Orlando.
- Visit [www.cityoforlando.net/public\\_works/kob/](http://www.cityoforlando.net/public_works/kob/) for volunteer events and opportunities.