

## HOUSTON CHRONICLE ARCHIVES

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### **A clean approach / *Program* helps north Houston Neighborhoods**

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Staff

Keep Houston Beautiful has launched a community-wide effort aimed at keeping north Houston streets clean, block by block.

Through its Adopt-a-Block *program*, local businesses, civic groups and groups of people can adopt a minimum of 500 yards of an incorporated city of Houston street. The group is then required to remove litter in the designated area at least four times per year for a two-year period.

In turn, Keep Houston Beautiful and the city provide groups with annual safety training, safety equipment and cleanup bags and an "Adopt-a-Block" sign recognizing the group at the designated block's location.

"This is an economic development and quality of life issue," said Beth Wolff, a Houston Realtor and chairwoman of Keep Houston Beautiful. "In the past it had more to do with quality of life, but if a city is not well-kept in appearance, it reflects badly upon the city.

"We're hoping to build awareness and have ongoing maintenance."

Wolff said the Adopt-a-Block *program* is an example of community initiatives encouraged through Keep Houston Beautiful and Houston Mayor Lee Brown's Clean Neighborhoods *Program*.

For more than 20 years, Keep Houston Beautiful has been "reaching out to all segments of (the) community to educate and empower individuals to take greater responsibility for beautifying and enhancing Houston's environment"

The organization focuses on beautification, litter reduction and recycling education. Keep Houston Beautiful accomplishments include reducing litter in Houston by 77 percent in 10 years, recruiting more than 20,000 community volunteers, removing nearly 1,600,000 pounds of debris and orchestrating more than 145 cleanup and beautification workdays, Wolff said.

Brown recognized one of the charter Adopt-a-Block participants at a press conference announcing the launch of the *program*. The *Fifth Ward Enrichment Program Inc* . Sports Initiative recently adopted the 1400 through 2400 blocks of Lockwood.

The *Fifth Ward Enrichment Program* was established in 1984 in response to the surrounding community's high rates of teen-age pregnancy, crime, students' failure to complete high school, drug use, and absent African-American fathers. The *program* serves more than 200 African-American and Latino boys between the ages of 9 and 18 years.

According to Ernest McMillan, executive director of the *Fifth Ward Enrichment Program* , the *program* leans toward civic action, such as the Adopt-a-Block *program* .

"We think activities such as Adopt-a-Block should be a joy, a treat to give back to the community," McMillan said. "If it (neighborhood) looks good, they feel good. It is not a punishment, but uplifting and something to be regarded with pride.

"Our participation in the campaign will transcend into our own neighborhoods." Aaron Simmons, a 14-year-old participant in the ***Fifth Ward Enrichment Program*** 's Sports Initiative, said, "We have been going around to the different blocks and picking up trash that doesn't belong. I feel good about it. If we don't clean up our areas it doesn't look good on us. I don't mind doing it because it is for the community."

I Have a Dream - Houston, a mentoring ***program*** for inner-city children in the Fourth ***Ward***, is hoping to kick off cleanup efforts on its Allen Parkway segment soon, said Joanna Chagre, ***program*** director for I Have a Dream.

"We like to get our students involved in community service," she said.

Wolff said people who would like to adopt a block are asked to contact Keep Houston Beautiful, 713-839-8855, and submit a request. Upon approval, a particular area will be assigned to the group, and "they take it from there," she said.

"It will be a win-win situation where neighborhoods are well-kept and people get recognition," Wolff said. "Hopefully, it will result in long-term maintenance."

The Clean Neighborhood ***program*** is a joint effort between Keep Houston Beautiful and the city of Houston. The ***program*** 's goal is to "help local businesses and civic groups become directly involved with the problems in their area and provide resources to assist them in taking action," Brown said.

"Since I became mayor, I have made the neighborhoods a priority," Brown said. "I believe that neighborhood-oriented government works. It works by involving citizens in both city services and in their own neighborhoods."

Thomas "Buck" Buchanan, acting director of Houston's Department of Solid Waste, said the Adopt-a-Block ***program*** supplements city services.

While the city does not provide litter pick-up service in neighborhoods, some is removed by city crews that perform mowing services on the city's rights of way, Buchanan said. However, litter accumulates between mowings.

"Urban litter inhibits economic development in cities," Buchanan said. "It's very difficult for us to resolve with the resources available. This ***program*** will allow us to further our efforts toward Mayor Lee Brown's goal of making Houston the cleanest large city in America.

"This is a great ***program*** to keep neighborhoods clean."

For more information on volunteering, donating or Keep Houston Beautiful's programs, call 713-839-8855 or visit the organization's web site at [www.houstonbeautiful.org](http://www.houstonbeautiful.org).

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