

Over the Back Fence  
For Friday December 5, 2008  
Approx 630 words

Those pesky citizens  
By Alva Wood

Eleanor Frost must have caught village administrator Henry Hill on a bad day.

Eleanor is secretary of the Schist Creek Garden Club and Beautification Committee. Volunteers scatter alyssum seed along the shoulders of the highway every spring. They scrub the graffiti off the public washrooms in the park, or cover it with paint that almost matches the original color. Twice a year, they organize a public cleanup of the wild land along the creek, picking up empty potato chip packages, disposable coffee cups, condoms, and beer cans left behind by weekend partiers.

They badgered village administrator Henry Hill until he told his Parks and Recreation staff to put out a couple of 50-gallon drums as garbage containers at the road access points.

"It won't work," Henry assured the Beautification Committee. "The kind of people who leave trash along the shore won't suddenly turn tidy just because we put out garbage cans for them to use."

Some of them did. But of course some still didn't. So the committee needed a fall cleanup program anyway. At least they didn't have to take their bags of garbage all the way home for pickup. They just dropped the bags into the drums instead.

Three weeks later, the bags were still there.

Committee president Astrid Bowers asked her husband, Mayor Jake Bowers, why the garbage wasn't being picked up. Jake asked administrator Henry Hill, who referred the query to Freddie Fallis, who passed the buck to Ronnie Burkholder, who's now driving the garbage truck.

"Henry said not to worry about it, now that summer's over," Ronnie shrugged.

So the Committee instructed Eleanor, as secretary, to write Henry an official letter requesting action.

*Dear Henry:*

*Thank you for providing garbage cans in the park along the creek this summer. They helped to keep our public property much cleaner. We understood from you that this would be a year-round process. However, since the summer, no one has been picking up the full bags. Perhaps you could instruct your staff to resume picking up garbage from these bins?*

*Yours sincerely,*

*Eleanor Frost*

*Secretary, Schist Creek Garden Club and Beautification Committee*

It took only two days for her to get a reply.

*Ms. Frost:*

*Some of you people have just too much time on your hands. My staff have better things to do than deal with constant interruptions from citizens who want to micromanage our operations. If we responded to every cocked-hat demand from self-appointed community groups, we would never manage to hold a single strategic planning meeting to develop a long-range plan for the orderly development of this community.*

*I must insist that you quit pestering us incessantly with petty demands for servicing of your personal projects, which do not appear to have any support from the wider constituency. You and others like you seem interested mainly in placing impediments in the way of progress and in preserving a style of life that is no longer sustainable.*

*You obviously have no idea of the workload that my staff must deal with every day. They are all extremely dedicated and hard working, and your repeated attacks on their integrity are extremely demoralizing.*

*In short, get a life, and leave us alone.*

*Henry Hill*

*Administrator*

Eleanor hung the letter on her clothesline until it stopped smoking. Then she tucked it into an envelope addressed to the mayor, Jake Bowers, with a covering note:

*Dear Jake,*

*I think you should know that someone seems to be forging letters on village stationery. This one has Henry's signature, but I can't believe he would write something so offensive. This kind of thing does not enhance our village's reputation. I hope measures can be taken to put the culprit out of business as soon as possible.*

*Regards, Eleanor*