

Caledon resident hopes her efforts to keep the community clean inspire others to do the same

By Rob Paul

Children are taught from an early age not to litter and to make an effort to pick up garbage to help keep the planet healthy. For many people, there are few things more upsetting than trying to embrace nature and get away from the stresses of everyday life than seeing a beautiful setting ruined by garbage.

In a Town like Caledon, known being full of hiking and biking trails, outdoor amenities, and its connection to the Greenbelt, most would assume it doesn't have an issue with people throwing their garbage out.

That hasn't been the case, in local resident Janice Reed's experience. In fact, the garbage problem on the Caledon Trailway has gotten so bad she's taken it upon herself to try and make a difference.

This isn't something new for Reed; she's been doing it for a handful of years and is worried because she's noticed that it's getting worse and, from her perspective, it seems like people are caring less and less about how the community looks.

'I've been doing it for a good three years,' she said. 'I started because three years ago I was walking in the winter and there was so much garbage, so I'd just take a garbage bag and then I'd have to take another'sometimes up to three garbage bags with me for a walk. Then when the season changes, and it's bike riding season, and now you're looking for garbage. I thought to myself that I can't just ride by it. So, I'd stop and pick up the garbage and now my bike has garbage bag on the pack.'

'I was fed up with looking at it and I thought, well if I'm walking, I'll just take a bag with me.'

Noticing the uptick in garbage she was collecting in recent months, Reed began tracking how much she was picking up in conjunction with her kilometres of exercise.

The numbers floored her.

'I started checking the numbers and, for instance, starting in January 2021, I walked 240 kilometres up until April 5,' she said. 'On April 5, I started bike riding and so far I've ridden 610 kilometres. At a total of 850 kilometres, I've picked up 73 bags of garbage on my walks and bike rides. On average, it's about 12 pieces of garbage per kilometre. I drag my bike around and load the garbage bag on to my bike and I take it to the next garbage bin, and I take out another garbage bag and I pick up more garbage.'

'My bike routes take forever because I stop so much and sometimes I'll leave the garbage and come back because I know it'll still be there. The garbage doesn't disappear, people don't pick up garbage'they toss it, and they leave it and it'll be there the next day and the next day until I pick it up.'

'I've thought, 'my gosh if the people who are walking would just pick up what they see,' but they don't and they walk right over it and I watch them. I'm the only one I've seen pick up the garbage.'

Seemingly being the only one putting in the effort to cleaning the trails, it can be frustrating for Reed that she's been doing it for so long and it hasn't gotten better.

'It's terrible,' she said. 'It's like putting garbage in your living room. It's personal. Don't litter our Caledon Trailway. You can bike on it and walk on it, but clean up the trail on your route and don't just step over it.'

It can be jarring to hear about the treatment of the trails in a community like Caledon that's known for its natural beauty, and Reed's

as shocked as anybody that it continues to be an issue.

'It's ghastly how disrespectful it is,' she said. 'If people knew how much garbage one person picked up, then maybe they'd start to look down and pick it up, too. That's what I'm hoping for; I'm hoping to inspire one person to pick something up?even just pick up what you threw yourself.'

The most prevalent pieces of garbage Reed finds herself picking up aren't shocking. It's plastic bottles, beer cans and liquor bottles, takeout food containers, coffee cups and lids, but there's also some major head-scratchers.

'I can easily pick up a bag full of those items on one trip. There's even dog poo in the bag,' she said. 'So, they're picking up the dog poo, but just leaving the bag on the ground? It's ridiculous, I just wonder why. I've picked up rubber blowup river rafts twice and I've picked up a whole set of car brakes. I've seen bags of shingles?which I can't pick up, so I email the Town. I email them at least every week for the stuff I can't lift on the trails.'

Though she has kept in contact with the Town about bigger items that need to be taken care of, she's beginning to think the Town won't be able to keep up with the amount of garbage if people don't start caring more.

'The Town has got to be concerned because the amount of garbage being tossed all over Caledon is increasing all the time,' she said. 'Even on the roads, there's couches, chairs, construction material, and I email the Town and they're very good and always come and pick it up, but surely they must be getting frustrated themselves.'

All Reed wants is for each person who takes advantage of all Caledon's outdoor beauty to take the time to understand how hurtful even one piece of litter can be and, if they did, she wouldn't have to be taking the initiative to be the unofficial custodian of the trailway.

'There's a lot of garbage and there's more coming and people need to stop littering and just walking over it,' she said. 'It's an insult to the environment and it's an insult to Canadians who care about the earth. This is the place we live; don't throw garbage around the place we live.'