



A Cleaner Alki COMMUNITY CLEANUPS

/ OUR STORY



Getting Started

My name is Erik Bell, I got heavily involved in community service work over the pandemic through Seattle Public Utilities' *Adopt a Street* program.

I'm a life-long West Seattleite, a graphic designer and photographer, and I've found great satisfaction utilizing my background to promote, document, and participate in local community cleanup events.

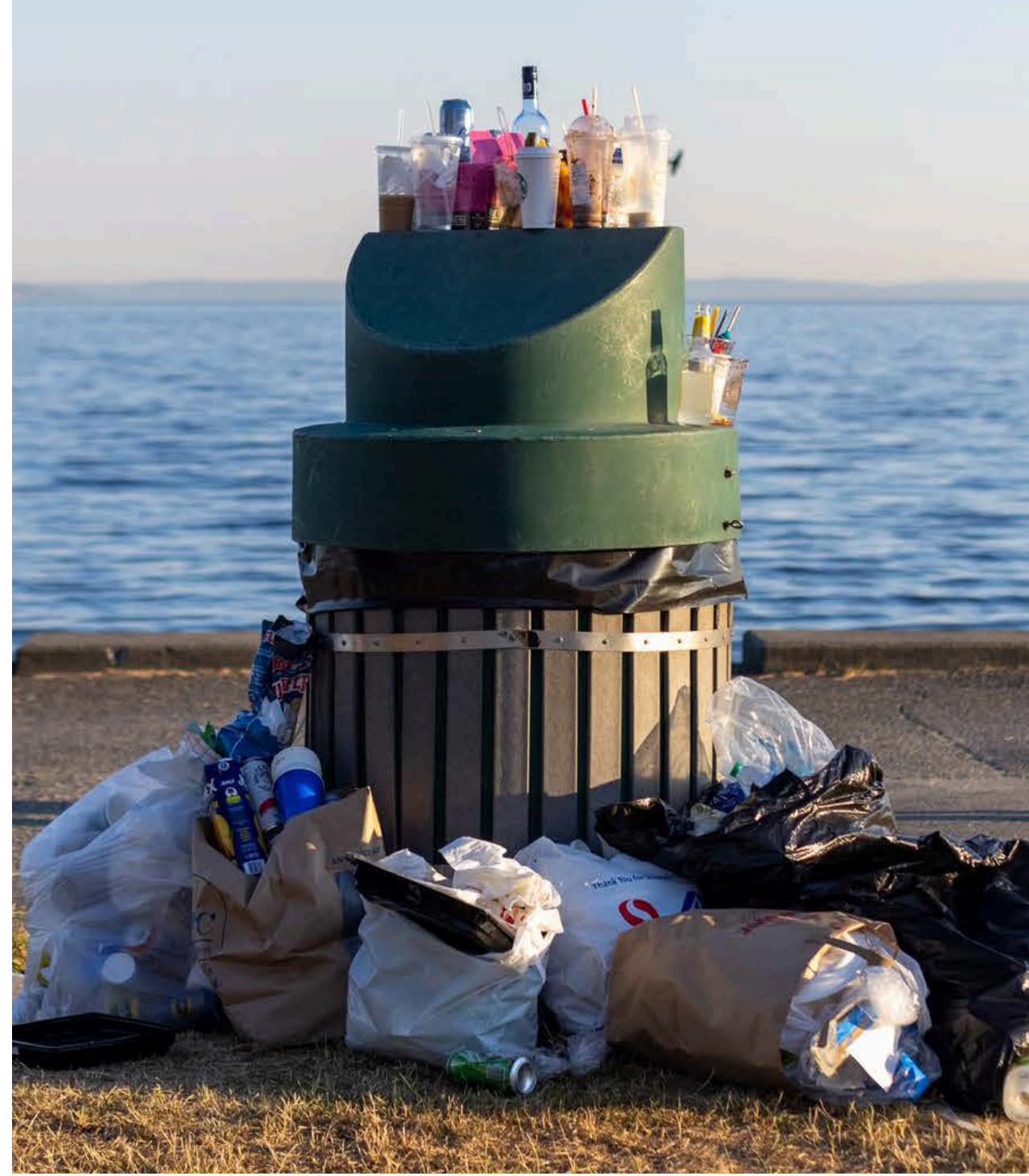
In the following pages I'd like to tell a bit about the group work we're doing through *A Cleaner Alki*, and how we're trying to complement the good works the city is doing.



Unfocused Beginnings

My interest in this type of work was born out of frustration and discouragement with the mess that parts of the city had become. But a friend's observation that my focus to find others to blame was a wake-up call. He rightfully noted that if I was bothered enough by the mess then I could do something about it rather than make up stories about who was to blame.

Around 2010, my brother and I started meeting Saturday mornings on Alki Beach and cleaning up during our weekend walks and my attitude and focus began to evolve.



Coming Together

After a decade of Saturday morning beach cleanups I started *A Cleaner Alki*, a Facebook group where I invited like-minded folks to join us and take on more ambitious projects. We moved off the beach and into other environments. This is also when I got actively involved in the *Adopt a Street* program.

I've run the group for several years now and we have a growing following of helpers. We've put on cleanups in residential neighborhoods, at parks and beaches, in business districts, on school campuses, along highways and messy thoroughfares, in illegal dumping grounds, neglected properties and abandoned encampments.



Engaging Community

Our group held over 500 cleanups in 2023 clearing 50,000+ lbs of trash and other dangerous materials out of our local environment.

I'd love to continue this community engagement model and leverage our growing team of helpers in addressing these complicated and ongoing issues.

From my experience neighbors want to help out, they just need some leadership and a plan. When we create a low barrier of entry and a positive experience people typically come back and bring friends when they do.



Supporting Our Neighbors

We like the challenge of troubled areas around town. An ongoing focus of our group has been the Rozella Building in White Center, a once beautiful and thriving 1920's apartment building. We went out weekly for a year and cleaned up this area to help local businesses stay afloat amidst drug activity, squatters and illegal dumping in the neighborhood.

After a year of persistence we felt a turning of the tide after seeing the squatters removed—and along with them the drug dealing and illegal activities on this block—and a feeling of rejuvenated community pride is returning to this busy little junction.



Into the Wild

Getting off the beaten path has helped us reclaim areas that have been overtaken by abandoned encampments, or have become dumping grounds to opportunists and illegal activities. Apathy and turning a blind eye have let these activities flourish unabated for years.

Creating a cleaner, safer community has been a huge motivation for staying consistent with our cleanups.

Exploring the community for areas in need and planning sensible solutions has become a key focus to our work.





Cleanup Types

Over the past several years we've discovered three distinct & consistent cleanup types we're doing:



Trash cleanups



Spruced cleanups



Block Drop cleanups

1. Trash cleanups

These are the prototypical events people probably think of when they hear of “community cleanups”.

Ours are generally 2-hour, organized events in known problem areas with specific attainable goals in mind.

We offer a range of opportunities for folks to get involved: from beach, park and school cleanups, to residential neighborhoods and business junctions, industrial zones, illegal dumping areas, and abandoned encampments.

People usually start light and then work their way into tougher cleanups.



2. Spruced cleanups

We started noticing lots of obstructions and invasive species out doing cleanup work, so we began incorporating “Sprucing” work into our lineups, which has helped broaden the demographic and interests of our volunteers.

Much of this work clears overgrown infrastructure—regaining sidewalks and stairways and clearing line-of-sight obstructions for pedestrians, bicyclists and motorists.

In clearing away the overgrowth, we then collect the trash that’s revealed as these areas open up.



3. Block Drop cleanups

Although much of our cleanup work is planned group events, in 2022 we also started a passive experiment that continues to be very well received around town.

Block Drops are mobile cleanup stations deployed around West Seattle and designed for ease of engagement.

Stations consist of signage, grabbers, buckets and bags. They're dropped off in family-friendly locations each day, left unattended, promoted on our social media and then collected at the end of each day.



3. Block Drop cleanups

The program originated as a year-long service project for my daughter's Girl Scout troop. They partnered with Adopt-a-Street director Jenny Frankl in earning their Silver Award.

The program is a social experiment of sorts that offers passive opportunities to live the scouting ideal of leaving the world a better place than you found it. At your pace, one block at a time.

Since starting in mid-2022, we've held 450 Block Drops in residential neighborhoods, business junctions, parks and schools, and collected over 7 tons of trash with help from an estimated 7,500 volunteers.



Building Partnerships

I see stewardship work as being involved in many facets of community betterment—not simply picking up trash. Wherever a problem exists is where the work should lead us and inspire us to seek solutions; a partnership between city leadership and our community at large.

In the past 6 months we've dove deeper into becoming better partners with the city by offering recurring weekly events with SDOT and Parks gardeners on Wednesdays and Thursdays, and working with Forest Stewards on Fridays. Through hard work we are building trust and relationships with these city agencies.



All Hands Cleanup Series

This past Saturday was our first All Hands Neighborhood Cleanup for SPU's Adopt a Street program, and we kicked it off in White Center.

Even though we only had two weeks to plan and promote it, we ended up having over 100 volunteers join us and we collected two and a half tons of trash from the neighborhood.

Although this was considered a resounding success by the city it was just a start to an area that could use a lot of help on both sides of Roxbury.

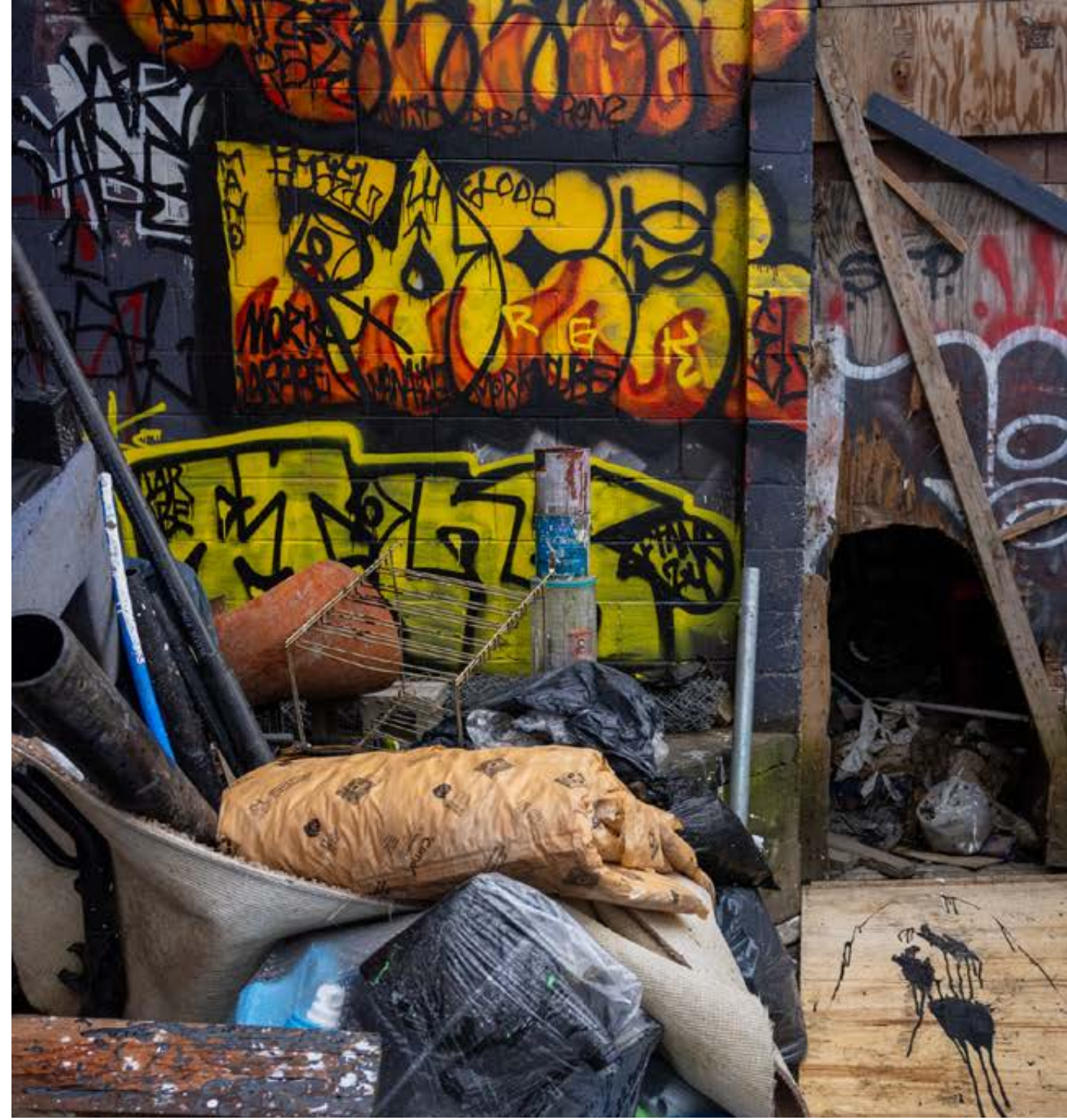


Scouting

Through our scouting, we identified a number of hot spots that deserve focused cleanup work which would better the neighborhood and help restore a sense of safety and care in the community.

The main problem we've had doing work in Unincorporated King County is the lack of a program for reporting and getting piles picked up.

Looking for ways to tackle these projects with the help of the city of Seattle and Unincorporated King County will be key in developing sustainable programs that can make meaningful change in the community.



We're All Stewards

In closing, I hope to leave you with a sense that we are all in this together and can all make meaningful change in this beautiful place we call home.

Imagine what would happen if we all picked up a bucket of trash from our neighborhood tomorrow, or helped open up access to a local sidewalk that has been overtaken by neglect.

I'm very inspired by the engagement I see at our events every day, and I look forward to seeing what we can accomplish in the coming years with more people coming onboard.

Thank you for this opportunity!





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