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Rosi Martin

Retired educator leading charge to make, maintain a cleaner community

INTERVIEW BY SANDRA J. PENNECKE

CORRESPONDENT

Rosi Martin envisions a litter-free Chesapeake. That's why the retired teacher has taken on volunteer roles with the Adopt-a-Highway and Sign Sweeper programs through the Department of Public Works.

"I like harmonious, clean surroundings, and find it most gratifying when my 'extended neighborhood backyard' is well-kept and litter-free," said Martin, who taught German at the old Great Bridge High School, as well as English and German at several area schools. She retired after 34 1/2 years as an educator.

Martin adopted River Walk Parkway, the main road into her community, in the summer of 2011. She picks up litter there several times each month. But, she noted, keeping the area clean is a never-ending process.

She is also an inaugural volunteer in the city's Sign Sweeper program, which began last year. Not only does Martin hand remove signs that are illegally posted near curbs, in medians and on utility poles, she also makes courtesy calls from the public works office each week alerting sign owners of their violation.

"I strongly believe in stewardship of our little corner of the world," said Martin, who does the clean ups solo. "I just can't wrap my mind around people littering."

Why did you choose to be involved with the Adopt-a-Highway and Sign Sweeper programs? After retiring from Deep Creek High School in June 2009, I wanted to get environmentally involved again and contribute in some way to my community.

What is the greatest challenge you face in your volunteer work? Not to get discouraged by the people who are oblivious to their surroundings and mindlessly toss any number of items out their windows! Taking down signs can be dangerous at times, depending on the location and the traffic, but proper clothing and caution minimize those problems. A real challenge in the sign sweeping is the phone call I make to the advertisers. I want to make sure I am respectful and empathetic, yet let them know why they can't place signs in the city's right of way.

What inspires you to do what you do? I respect and appreciate my surroundings. River Walk is a natural little oasis. I want to help maintain it.

What in your background best prepared you for doing what you do? While I taught at Maury High School, I founded and sponsored the environmental club, Phoenix Rising, in 1989. We were involved in regular litter clean-ups, were (among) the first to adopt a wetland area, started an aluminum recycling program at Maury, and donated thousands of dollars to the Chesapeake Bay Foundation. I was a member of the Norfolk Environmental Commission, volunteer coordinator for Clean the Bay Day and Earth Day, founder of the Tree-of-Hope project, and took part in countless other environmental activities. I received the "Earthwatcher" Environmental Educator Award from the Virginia Living Museum and was recognized for my community contributions on behalf of Virginia's environment by the Chesapeake Bay Foundation.

What was the oddest/most unique piece of trash you've found while doing the Adopt-a-Highway volunteer work? I once discovered an entire set of silverware scattered underneath a mound of grass clippings in the median. I thought perhaps some husband didn't like the pattern and tossed it out after mowing the grass.

If a snapshot was taken of you enjoying a perfect day, what would it look like? Taking a long, meandering walk in historic Williamsburg on a sunny autumn day.

Favorite gadget: Smoothie maker

Favorite movies: "Casablanca," "The Count of Monte Cris-to" (Richard Chamberlain version)

Pet peeve: Tailgating

Best/worst job: Teacher/file clerk

First car: 1967 Plymouth Valiant

First celebrity crush: Laurence Harvey in "Summer and Smoke"

Comfort food: Hot chocolate and a blueberry scone

Favorite TV show from the past: "The Carol Burnett Show"

A recently read book you'd recommend: "The Racketeer" by John Grisham

A recently watched movie (theater or DVD) you'd recommend: "Argo"

Of what achievements are you most proud? My son; he is the most decent, kind and compassionate person I know.

Something you've done that others might not expect of you: I took a Dance on Broadway class recently.

If you could invite three famous people, living or dead, to dinner, who would they be? Dalai Lama, Sarah Ban Breathnach and Charlie Rose

Theme song: "What a Wonderful World"

Good luck charm: Gratitude

The most memorable words of wisdom you received and from whom: "There is always a blue sky above the clouds," from a book by Marianne Williams.

The words of wisdom you'd share with someone interested in doing what you do: If you decide to pick up litter, always take along a bigger plastic bag than you originally planned. Don't forget your litter stick, it's a back saver. Always wear your safety vest when sweeping for signs. Stay committed; you're helping to make our community a nicer place!



SANDRA J. PENNECKE

Bio

Full name Rosmarie Lonitz Martin

Neighborhood River Walk

Hometown Chemnitz, Germany

Age 68

Nickname Rosi

Children Bryan Zentz; 43

Pet My beloved cat, Ninja, who will always be with me in spirit.

Church affiliation Unity Renaissance

Occupation Retired teacher

Education Bachelor of Science from Radford University

Hobbies Bird watching, reading

Personal motto Breathe deeply – practice mindfulness!