

Southern Arizona Adopt a Highway group keeps highway clean for more than a decade

Volunteers cleaned up three tons of trash in past five years

PHOENIX — The Arizona Department of Transportation Adopt a Highway program is celebrating 25 years of allowing individuals, organizations and businesses the opportunity to remove litter from two-mile sections of the roadside within the Arizona State Highway System. Over the past two decades, Adopt a Highway volunteers have provided a statewide labor benefit in the millions of dollars.

One Adopt a Highway volunteer group has been especially busy. The Southern Arizona Environmental Management Society (SAEMS) has been cleaning up litter for more than a decade on their adopted section of Interstate 10 between Tucson and Benson in southern Arizona.

In just the past five years, this group has logged hundreds of hours along the highway and picked up more than three tons of trash.

"I joined the Adopt a Highway program because I like being outdoors and I wanted to get my teenage daughters involved in community service," said Barbara Ricca, SAEMS treasurer, who joined the group in 2001.

The experience left a lasting impression on Ricca's daughters. As a last request before moving to Scotland, her youngest daughter Amanda wanted to volunteer with her mom and the Adopt a Highway group one more time.

The group often picks up typical roadside litter such as paper, plastic, Styrofoam and glass; however, volunteers have also found unusual items like a box of ready-to-eat meals, a cash register and a ballet tutu. As a fun incentive for picking up trash, the group pitches in to purchase a gift card for the volunteer with the most unusual find.

In February 2012, volunteer Al Jorissen won the gift card for finding a toy tea set complete with a tea pot, four tea cups and saucers.

For more information on the Adopt a Highway program, please visit azdot.gov/Highways/AdoptaHwy/Index.asp.

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