

**NIE** **Connect with your environment**  
 Learn about environmental issues, in your community and how you can get involved.

# Cigarette butts hurt environment

By ANNA McCARTNEY  
 Contributing writer

The Sisters of St. Joseph Neighborhood Network is working to keep cigarette butts off city streets and out of local waterways, thanks to a \$2,500 grant from Keep America Beautiful's Cigarette Litter Prevention Program.

Every year, the International Coastal Cleanup shows that cigarette butts are the most littered item, locally, nationally and around the world.

A cigarette butt dropped to the ground may seem insignificant.

But they are carried by rain into storm drains and eventually to streams, rivers, lakes and the ocean.

Billions of them add up to a big impact on the environment and the places we live because they are composed of cellulose acetate, a form of plastic that persists in the environment.

Keep America Beautiful studies have found that cigarette butt litter occurs most often at transition points — areas where a person must stop smoking before proceeding into another area. These include bus stops, entrances to stores and public buildings and the sidewalk areas outside of bars and restaurants, among others.

By partnering with the Erie County Health Department and the Erie Police Department, SSSJNN will use the funding to integrate four proven approaches to address this problem in their eastside neighborhood. They will:

- Encourage enforcement of litter laws, including cigarette litter;
- Raise awareness about the issue using public ser-



**THIS IS LITTER TOO.**

KEEP AMERICA BEAUTIFUL

vice messages;

■ Place ash receptacles at transition points, such as entrances to public buildings;

■ Distribute pocket or portable ashtrays to adult smokers.

“During our first cleanup, we collected over 747 cigarette butts within 1½ hours. With the help of residents like Francene Moore, who daily picks up litter during summer, we hope to improve one block at a time in this neighborhood,” says Margarita Dangel, site director for the SSSJNN eastside project.

During the past 10 years, the CLPP has consistently cut cigarette butt litter by approximately half based on assessments taken in the first four months to six months after program implementation.

Survey results also demonstrate that as communities continue to monitor the program, those reductions are sustained or even increased over time.

**ANNA McCARTNEY**, a communications and education specialist for Pennsylvania Sea Grant, can be reached by e-mail at [axm40@psu.edu](mailto:axm40@psu.edu).



ANNA McCARTNEY/Contributed photo

Scott Gotham, left, and David Beals walked Six Mile and Four Mile creeks from mouth to headwaters to document and shed light on the condition of Lake Erie tributaries. Their next walk scheduled for June is Seven Mile creek.

# Water keepers

## Citizen action helps to improve local streams

By ANNA McCARTNEY  
 Contributing writer

Last year, David Beals and Scott Gotham walked Six Mile and Four Mile creeks from mouth to headwaters to document the condition of the creeks.

Beals, who grew up hiking these creeks, was shocked by the amount of trash and the numerous impediments that impact the flow of water, including locomotive ballast or large chunks of concrete partially encased in metal in the lower reaches of Four Mile.

“Six Mile almost seemed pristine compared to Four Mile, where we saw a large amount of trash where it flows through Lawrence Park and Wesleyville. So much that we did not pick up any, as we would have had two trucks full,” said Beals.

Four Mile begins its journey to Lake Erie in Greene Township and flows through the municipalities of Harborcreek Township, Wesleyville Borough and Lawrence Park Township. Its watershed includes densely developed areas from Route 5 to East 38th Street, as well as Penn State Behrend. Large tracts of forests, wetlands and farmland have been replaced with impervious surfaces, including residential and commercial buildings, malls, roads and parking lots.

All those impervious surfaces also impact the flow of the stream by creating stormwater runoff, a major problem that causes streambank erosion and carries sediment, litter and other pollutants downstream.

Problems found by Beals and Gotham on Four Mile Creek are being addressed by Ann Quinn, director of Greener Behrend, and Dave Skellie, Pennsylvania Sea Grant coastal land use and economic specialist. They have and continue to lead efforts to secure funding and enlist volunteers for a variety of projects.

“A stormwater control project completed in 2008 on Trout Run, a tributary of Four Mile Creek, which runs through the Behrend

campus, substantially reduced erosion and sedimentation,” said Skellie. In addition, this Lake Erie tributary, considered to be nearly unfishable for many decades, now has a fish ladder and a bypass to allow fish to move past the two impediments that kept steelhead from migrating upstream.

Together with the removal of the Spring Creek dam near Station Road and a concrete-capped obstruction on the Behrend campus, fish can now move further upstream. In 2014 the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission found steelhead as far upstream as the mobile home park located just south of Station Road.

The locomotive ballast still needs to be removed. Yet there are ongoing efforts to remove trash at some locations. Each year, Behrend students, staff and other volunteers join Skellie and Quinn to document and remove trash during the International Coastal Cleanup along the main trail near the Behrend campus and at the mouth of Four Mile Creek in Lawrence Park.

Greener Behrend has also initiated monthly cleanups of Four Mile Creek and the Wintergreen Gorge Trail system. “If we continue these cleanups, we can change the culture here on campus to pack it in, pack it out,” said Nico Carbo, Greener Behrend president.

Beals is glad to know about these efforts but hopes more people will get involved. “It is important that we preserve and protect these creeks. After all, this is the water that flows into Lake Erie and the same water that we drink,” said Beals.

To learn more about these efforts to protect local waterways, contact Beals at [david.beals@manheim.com](mailto:david.beals@manheim.com); Skellie at [dus18@psu.edu](mailto:dus18@psu.edu); or Quinn at [abq1@psu.edu](mailto:abq1@psu.edu).

**ANNA McCARTNEY**, a communications and education specialist for Pennsylvania Sea Grant, can be reached by e-mail at [axm40@psu.edu](mailto:axm40@psu.edu).



DAVID BEALS/Contributed photo

Creek walks expose problems like this one along Four Mile Creek. Cleaning it up is a perfect opportunity for municipalities and citizens to work together to improve their communities.



DAVE SKELLIE PA SEA GRANT/Contributed photo

Beals and Gotham saw many concrete abutments, rebar and concrete reinforcing and barrels filled with concrete like the ones above in Four Mile Creek.



ANN QUINN/Contributed photo

Greener Behrend concentrates its efforts on the Four Mile Creek subwatershed of Lake Erie. Students, above, removed trash from Wintergreen Gorge. The group has also adopted Lawrence Park Beach at the mouth of Four Mile for monthly cleanups.



### LEARN MORE

**What:** Regional Science Consortium Visiting Scientist Speaker Sara Turner, Ph.D., Mercyhurst University professor of biology, on “Sexual Selection or Superior Survivorship: Superlative Studies on Salmon.”

**Where:** Tom Ridge Environmental Center

**When:** Tuesday, April 21 at 7 p.m.

**Cost:** Free and open to the public



## Student suggests 3 ways for you to conserve water

Dear editor:

The average American family of four uses 400 gallons of water a day. That's way too much water! Only 3 percent of Earth's water is fresh, and less than that is available to us.

Here are some suggestions to help conserve water. First, turn the water off when shaving or brushing your teeth. When you get in the shower, get wet. Then turn the faucet off while you soap up. Remember to leave the water temperature where you set it, when you turned it off. Then rinse off and you're done.

Second, install low-flow showerheads and aerators. Low-flow devices are



Zach Ball

inexpensive (maybe \$10-\$20 for a showerhead). A faucet aerator costs less than \$5. Both are easy to install.

The third way to conserve water is to wash clothes less often. Wait until you have a large load, rather than washing every day or so. Every time you run the washer, you burn electricity, which comes from fossil fuels.

Everyone must do their part, because we all need and want water.

— Zach Ball, fourth grade, Tracy Elementary School

This page brought to you by:



Check out these websites to learn more:

- <http://www2.epa.gov/cleanwaterrule>
- <http://water.epa.gov/type/rs/drinkingwatermap.cfm>
- [www.paseagrant.org/](http://www.paseagrant.org/)
- [www.facebook.com/GreenerBehrend](http://www.facebook.com/GreenerBehrend)

Find articles of other examples of people and projects that improve our community. Why are projects like these and volunteers important? Have you ever participated in a neighborhood cleanup or considered adopting a stream near you? Share your ideas about why volunteering to keep water resources safe is important. Send your letters to [axm40@psu.edu](mailto:axm40@psu.edu).

