

Daily 'trash habit' saves cyclists from trail mischief

Mercer Island retirees clear tacks on Bike to Work Day

By Cody Ellerd
Mercer Island Reporter

Paul and Beth Anderson are out picking up trash every morning on their walk from Covenant Shores retirement home to the Park on the Lid. But seeing them crouched down on the ground together last Friday, not using their usual grabbing stick, John Duggan stopped to see what was going on.

It was Seattle's Bike to Work Day. The elderly couple that Duggan, a lawyer who commutes from Bellevue to Pioneer Square on his bicycle, stopped to talk to was picking up a spread of tiny carpet tacks that were scattered across the bike trail.

"They didn't get it," said Duggan, 46. He had to explain to the Andersons that it was one of the biggest biking

days of the year, that there is a lot of tension between cyclists and motorists on Mercer Island – and that the tacks probably weren't accidentally dropped out of someone's bag.

"The irony is that here's the best and the worst of humanity," Duggan said. "Someone's putting tacks on the trail, and here's someone else picking them up."

Michele Glickerman, who rides her bike from Seattle to her job at the Children's Institute for Learning Differences on Mercer Island, said that several cyclists had ruptured

tires as a result of the tacks, which were left on the path near the park's tennis courts.

When Duggan arrived in downtown Seattle that morning, he stopped at one of the bike stations set up across the city that day in honor of the Bike to Work event. He reported the incident to members of the Seattle Bike Alliance and Cascade Bicycle Club, who put the word of warning out to the cycling community.

But Duggan, whose law practice focuses on cycling advocacy, still couldn't get the Andersons off his mind. He told Glickerman, who he had recently met at a bike event, about his encounter with them. Both agreed they should be recognized not just for what they did on Bike to Work Day, but what they do every day on their regular walk.

Indeed, to hear the Andersons tell it, that day was just par for the course.

"We always walk in the morning, around 8:15," said Beth. "I'm just glad we happened to notice. My husband saw the first one. The grabber didn't work to pick it up. So he picked it up with his fingers, and said, 'Look what I found, my goodness.'"

Paul, a former philosophy professor, and Beth, a former medical assistant, began their habit of picking up trash in Seattle's Seward



Retirees Beth and Paul

Anderson return from their daily walk. Every day, the couple walks from their Covenant Shores residence to the Park on the Lid, picking up trash along the way.

Chad Coleman/
Mercer Island Reporter

'If we all did a little bit every day, we'd all be better off.'

John Duggan
BICYCLE COMMUTER

Park neighborhood, where they lived before moving to Mercer Island two-and-a-half years ago.

Paul said they were inspired by another couple they knew in Seward Park, who got written up in the local paper.

"It gives us a certain amount of appreciation to pick up trash that other people drop," said Beth.

They nearly always leave for their walks with a grabber so they don't have to bend down, and a plastic bag. The exception is when

it's raining. Instead of the grabber on those days, they carry an umbrella.

Mostly they fill their bag with run-of-the-mill garbage. A paycheck they came across one day they returned to the company that issued it, and a flashlight they brought home.

"If someone wants to describe the flashlight and claim it, I still have it," Paul said.

Several days later, the Andersons were still finding tacks that they missed the first time around.

Duggan, for his part, was still biking to work like always, undeterred by the risks he might encounter on the trail. People like Paul and Beth Anderson reassure him, and give him something to aspire to in his old age, he said.

"There's some son of a gun out there just trying to cause problems, and this great old man and his wife, they're just doing a little tiny bit every day," Duggan said. "If we all did a little bit every day, we'd all be better off."