



McHenry County Division of Transportation

Celebrating 100 Years, 1913-2013

Each month this year, a new article celebrating the 100 year anniversary of the McHenry County Division of Transportation will be featured in the Northwest Herald. The fifth article, printed on May 24th, covered the MCDOT's Adopt-A-Highway program. Watch for the sixth article on the history of County Engineers at the MCDOT to be published at the end of June.



McHenry County's Adopt-A-Highway Program

Seeing garbage along a roadway is never considered scenic.

Styrofoam cups or to-go containers along the side of the road are not only unsightly, but can take an average of 50 years to biodegrade. With this timeframe and abundance of roadside trash, it is clear that a litter-free movement was desperately needed.

Many of you may recall two national advertising campaigns that came out in the 1970s to attack the problem of garbage being discarded.

The first, geared toward adults, was associated with a tear-in-the-eye Native American seeing the garbage and pollution wherever he traveled and the slogan "Keep America Beautiful". The second, geared toward children, was associated with a cartoon-talking owl, Woodsy, and the slogan "Give a Hoot, Don't Pollute".

With litter along roads and pollution choking America, the "Green" movement became more main stream. It was also at this time that cleaning up garbage was deemed a high priority, and Government took notice.

With local Government budgets strained, local agencies began to think outside of the box. Organizations and groups always enjoy free advertisement, and most enjoy helping their communities. The first recognized Adopt-A-Highway group in the United States was the Tyler Citivan Club in 1985 along a 2 mile stretch of U.S. Route 69 in Texas.

The McHenry County Division of Transportation (MCDOT) realized that with their vast network of roads throughout the County, having a volunteer program to help keep roads litter-free could be of great benefit to the MCDOT and volunteer groups alike. It was on July 18, 1995 that the McHenry County Board passed the Adopt-A-Highway program locally.

Over time, the MCDOT divided their roads into ½ mile to 1 mile sections, and made them available for volunteers to adopt. A given individual or group makes a request to adopt a specific section by completing an application.

Once their application has been received, it is brought before the County's Transportation Committee and the County Board for approval. After being approved by the County Board, the volunteer group signs an agreement with the County to maintain a specific section of road four times a year for two years by picking up trash and keeping it litter free.

Some very energetic groups pick up litter on a monthly basis and in some outstanding cases, weekly going far above and beyond the requirements of the program. Also at this time, a sign with the group's name is posted along the section of road.

The MCDOT provides each group with garbage bags, recycling bags, "Clean Up Crew Working" temporary signs, vests, litter pickers, t-shirts, and an informational video. Clear plastic bags are also offered and supplied to those groups who so desire to "keep" items that they find which can be recycled to possibly help raise money for their specific Adopt-A-Highway group's use.

Once the group has received their supplies they are able to schedule pick up dates. All this is coordinated through the MCDOT, who records those dates and makes sure groups are picking up regularly. Sections that are not adopted are cleaned by MCDOT staff.



Currently 146 groups maintain approximately 158 miles of County Highways. These volunteers work tirelessly to help keep McHenry County clean and beautiful. Without their efforts, government employees would be needed to pick up litter on a regular basis which could financially burden many local governments.

More information about the McHenry County Adopt-A-Highway program can be found on the MCDOT website www.McHenryCountyDOT.org and then click on the Adopt-A-Highway link. You can also call the MCDOT Adopt-A-Highway Coordinator, Chalen Daigle, at (815) 334-4970. Over time, some groups retire and new sections become available while most groups that clean up their section are welcome to renew their commitment every two years. Check the website to see what roads are currently available for adoption.

In addition to the MCDOT's successful Adopt-A-Highway program, the Illinois Department of Transportation and several municipalities and townships have successful Adopt-A-Highway programs within the county to help keep other roads in the area litter-free.

As summer starts and more people are moving outside to enjoy warm weather, let's all work to keep McHenry County beautiful. As Woodsy says, "Give a Hoot, Don't Pollute". Happy and safe travels.

The McHenry County Division of Transportation is now on Facebook!

Visit McHenryCountyDOT.org for more information.

