

She's got the scoop on water quality

Arundel on the Bay woman wants more neighborhoods to install pet-waste stations

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Julie Winters has a passion for the environment, and also a passion for dogs.

Now she's combining her two loves into a single project - installing pet-waste collection stations to make it easier for dog-lovers to pick up their pooches' waste and keep it out of area waterways.

"Everybody knows I'm crazy about my dogs, so it was a good fit," said Winters, the proud owner of Rosebud and Daisy, a pair of friendly Boykin spaniels.

Six pet-waste stations are being installed in strategic spots in Winters' neighborhood of Arundel on the Bay, which is south of Annapolis at the end of a peninsula that juts out into the Chesapeake Bay.

The pet-waste stations include a dispenser for bags and a lined trash can to discard the poop-filled bags. The crews who take care of maintaining community property will empty the trash cans, Winters said.

Winters would like to expand her project to other nearby neighborhoods such as Hillsmere and Highland Beach. She's hoping to win an online contest for a \$10,000 grant to make the project happen.

She's one of dozens of activists who have entered a Grant for Change contest from online outdoors apparel company Nau.com. The Oregon-based company is giving out one grant, based partly on votes from visitors to the firm's Web site.

Voting runs through Aug. 17 and the winner will be announced in October.

Winters said she has tough competition. Other nominees include a grandmother who runs marathons to raise money for drug treatment programs, a biologist restoring underwater kelp forests, and teachers trying to build an eco-friendly school in Idaho.

But what Winters' project has going for it is its simplicity: dog poop ruins the water with bacteria and nutrients, a problem that can be prevented by simply properly picking up animal waste.



Julie Winters spearheaded an effort to install pet-waste collection stations in her community of Arundel on the Bay, south of Annapolis. She has entered an online contest to win a \$10,000 grant to expand the effort to other neighborhoods.

"It's kind of hilarious to be almost 50 years old and go around talking about poop," said Winters, who works for the Environmental Protection Agency and serves on the board of directors of the South River Federation.

Winters said state data shows that in both the Severn River to the north of Arundel on the Bay and in the South River to the south, more than 60 percent of the bacteria in the water comes from pet waste.

When there's too much bacteria in the water, both people and pets can get sick from swimming and wading in the water. Health officials routinely close beaches to swimming when bacteria counts spike.

Data in hand, she went to the Property Owners Association, Arundel-on-the-Bay, seeking approval and money to install pet-waste stations. Association leaders quickly jumped on board.

Former association president Harvey Young said the pet-waste stations will help dog owners do the right thing and clean up after their pets properly.

"We have a large number of dog-walkers, probably half our population has dogs," he said.

Current President Andrew Grannell said the group had just started looking into the dog-poop problem when Winters approached them, so the timing was perfect.

Winters was able to get money to pay for the pet-waste stations from the county's first Watershed Stewards Academy, saving the community money.

Winters attended the academy, which teaches individuals about the environment and trains them in how to carry out community projects. The academy provided seed money to help students fund their final, "capstone" projects. The pet-waste stations were Winters' project.

Winters said she thinks tackling pet waste is a good entry point into environmental issues. It's easy to understand and easy to talk about.

In addition to official planning meetings, Winters has spread the word about pet waste while walking her dogs.

Besides expanding the pet-waste stations to other neighborhoods, Winters hopes the project will lead to more environmental programs with the community.

"The pet waste piece is a good entry point ... This is really the first step," she said.