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Gearing up for Great American Cleanup:
Men, boys team up to keep neighborhood clean

(March 28, 2011) LaSwann Beasley hopes that keeping one area of LaGrange clean will become infectious, leading others to keep surrounding streets, and eventually the whole neighborhood, and ideally the entire city clean and litter-free.

With that in mind, the Sons of LaGrange Masonic Lodge 537, of which Beasley is a member, adopted Watson Street, where the lodge is located, and pledged to keep it clean as part of Keep Troup Beautiful's Adopt-a-Spot program. On the last Saturday in February, Beasley led men from the lodge on their first community cleanup along Watson Street.

"We talked with citizens to let them know we'd be picking up trash on their street," said Beasley. "This is where our lodge is, so why wouldn't we try to put back into the community? These people keep a watch out for the lodge, so we're going to return the favor."

While 13 boys of the James A. Sherman Council 34, Knights of Pythagoras, were in a meeting, about a dozen men from the Masonic Lodge picked up litter, gathering several large bags filled with trash, according to Beasley. When litter shows up again, the Masons and Knights will return to clean, at least quarterly or more as needed, said Beasley, community services coordinator for the groups. His hope is that others will catch the anti-litter bug.

"We're hoping if others see us keeping the street clean, it will get contagious and they will take more pride in their neighborhood and keep it cleaner," said Beasley. "Hopefully surrounding neighborhoods will view Watson Street as one of the cleanest

streets around, and they will try to keep their streets cleaned up, too. It's got to start somewhere."

That's music to the ears of Doris Jefferson, executive director of Keep Troup Beautiful, which holds the Great American Cleanup in LaGrange and Hogansville on April 16 and West Point on April 23. She applauds the Knights and Masons as Pacesetters for this year's Cleanup.

"Keeping Troup County clean and green is simply a matter of commitment and community-mindedness," said Jefferson. "It starts with the individual."

Individuals like LaSwann Beasley, who believes that leading youth in his organization is all about "making young boys into better men."

"These are kids who are striving to be good citizens," he said. "We set a pretty high standard for them in February and they say they're going to do everything they can to outdo us. They have volunteered to cut grass for residents in the neighborhood and are committed to giving back to the community. I hope other kids will see what they're doing and want to help out their communities."

Along with keeping the area at their lodge tidy, the Masons and Knights picked up litter at the Mega Lake Cleanup sponsored by the West Point Lake Coalition on Saturday and plan to do their part at Keep Troup Beautiful's Great American Cleanup on April 16.

To register for the Great American Cleanup, call Keep Troup Beautiful, 706-884-9922, or pick up registration forms at their offices at 333 Main Street.