

FOLKS volunteers work to keep Lake Keowee area clean

BY NORM CANNADA
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SENECA — One morning in May, John Johnston met a small group of people on his dock on Lake Keowee to go out for a boat ride.

And while they enjoyed the time on the water, they had another purpose — cleaning up trash along the shoreline.

Johnson and his team were part of a volunteer force of more than 200 volunteers in May checking the shorelines for garbage left there and picking it up.

These “lake sweeps” have been happening on the shores of all of Lake Keowee for the past 25 years, an organized effort of the Friends of Lake Keowee Society (FOLKS).

“It’s a good thing for three or four old guys to do together,” said Johnson, whose team is assigned to sections in the southern area of the lake. “A lot of times we are just cruising along the shoreline, which is great because we’re old and we can just sit on the boat, tell lies and have a wonderful time. It’s a real low-stress time of the morning.”

And they work some, too, collecting about three bags of trash on their most recent trip in May. Many other teams were on other sections of the lake during the same “two-week window” last month getting the lake areas picked up and cleaned for the summer.

In May, as many as 80 boats cruised along their assigned shorelines collecting everything from soda cans and bait buckets to tires and water heaters, according to a FOLKS news release. Teams clean a total of 300 miles of shoreline, and each team is responsible for about 3 miles, which the release said takes “a full morning” to complete.

‘Lake sweeps are a lot of fun and a great way to enjoy a day on the lake. We make new friends and we make a difference.’

Becky Gilstrap
Organizes groups for The Reserve at Lake Keowee



From left, Joe Sachs, Rob Ries, Elaine Roberts, Paul and Audrey Fulton and Lori Erwin take a break from picking up litter at The Reserve at Lake Keowee.

“Those of us lucky enough to have Lake Keowee for swimming, boating, fishing and watching sunsets need to take care of it,” said Scott Calderwood, an organizer for the overall effort. “Sweeps have made a differ-

ence. The lake has gotten a lot cleaner.”

“Lake sweeps are a lot of fun and a great way to enjoy a day on the lake,” added Becky Gilstrap, who organizes groups for The Reserve at Lake Keowee. “We make new friends and we make a difference.”

Johnson has been volunteering since 2014 and says it usually takes his team three hours to pick up litter in two sections of the lake. He said his team is picking up less trash now than when he started.

“The part of the lake we do is most-

ly wooded shoreline,” he said. “In the last couple of years, all of that area is being developed and the trash has almost completely disappeared. Wherever there are houses, we don’t find any trash.”

“The places that we do find trash are places that you can access from the road from the land side,” he added. “One is Cane Creek Landing, where people come down to fish and they sit on the bank and leave bait cans and beer bottles and cans.”

Henry Gordon, a commander of a group of team captains, including Johnson, said the work is fun and important.

“We try to make it fun. We’ve got a good bunch of volunteers, and they do a great job,” Gordon said.

“It’s a very worthwhile cause, and we appreciate all the volunteers that do it. It’s a great thing for the community, and I hope we can keep doing it. We still have to stay after it.”

Carol Savage has spent 10 years



Dropping off collected trash at a dumpster in the main parking lot of Fall Creek Landing, from left, are Roberta Lodi, Carol Savage, Bob Lodi, Ben Lodi and Ronnie Franklin.

PHOTOS SPECIAL TO THE JOURNAL