

Kids clean mess grown-ups leave on lake's shore

■ 4-H volunteers pick up 250 pounds of garbage at the Durand-Eastman beach.

BY STAFF WRITER
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IRONDEQUOIT

Heather and Meaghan Bennett grasped slippery weeds at Durand-Eastman Beach, looking for hidden treasure.

Heather held up a colorful box that once held fireworks. Meaghan showed off her faded, green beer bottle. But Jamie Romeo had them both beaten with her own discovery.

"Underwear!" she yelled, and the other two had to check it out.

True, another man's junk may be another man's treasure. But yesterday, as the girls cleaned up the beach as part of a countywide 4-H project, they found their greatest treasure to be the feeling that comes from helping others.

"I think it's fun," said a rain-soaked, slightly chilled Jamie. "If we don't clean up the beach, no one else is going to. People come to the beach to watch sunsets and stuff like that. Twenty-five years from now, they won't want to sit in a landfill."

By helping the community, Meaghan added, they're ultimately helping themselves.

"We swim here," she said. "We see dead fish here, and it makes us afraid of what was in there that killed them."

The girls were among 35

middle and elementary school students participating in the event. It was part of the Great Lakes portion of the International Coastal Cleanup, which attracts more than 200,000 people worldwide.

Despite the rain and whipping winds, yesterday's group started at 9 a.m. in the westernmost parking lot in Durand-Eastman Park.

Local 4-H leader Kim Romeo and the Monroe County 4-H office organized the event.

"The kids realize they count — and that they're as accountable as grown-ups are," Romeo said. "If they're picking up beaches now, the chances of them doing something to harm their environment later are much less."

The local beach cleanup has been held for four years.

This year, the volume of trash picked up was down slightly, perhaps because of the weather. The volunteers gathered 24 bags of trash weighing about 250 pounds.

But last year, the group picked up 50 bags containing 600 pounds of beach trash, including barbecue grills, golf balls and a pineapple.

"You wonder, why do grown-ups throw so much stuff here?" asked Jamie. "It's like children who need to be told to pick up their toys." □



Junk found

Jamie Romeo, 12, center, finds a beer can as she and fellow 4-H'ers Meaghan Bennett, 8, left, and Heather Bennett, 11, help clean up Durand-Eastman Beach in Irondequoit yesterday.

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