

Thank you Mayor Anzaldi,

I truly appreciate this opportunity to join you and this tremendous collection of individuals invested in a brighter future for our public lands. I am here today on behalf of *Take Pride in America* – a national partnership program designed to increase volunteerism on public lands. Take Pride is a federal initiative housed in the Office of the Secretary of the Interior. While inherently bipartisan, this program benefits from the vast resources of the U.S. Department of the Interior, as well as the overall federal government. We strive to bridge the ever-present gap between the public and private sectors. I surmise that most of you in today's audience either work for, or do business in conjunction with, federal, state and local governments. You likely know, (all too well perhaps,) the restrictions and barriers that can inhibit something even so philanthropic as a clean up program or litter-free initiative. We at Take Pride do not believe that Americans should be able to use bureaucracy as an excuse to not take a stake in their own public lands. Our motto is: "It's your land, lend a hand" -- A nice catchphrase that rhymes - but the message behind the phrase is really ingenious. Government has neither the manpower, finances, nor the time to effectively combat the epidemic of litter. It **IS**, however, up to Government to place the onus on *everyone* - from the young child to the senior citizen; city official to a passing tourist – to take a stake in their public lands and embrace ownership.

Take Pride encourages this on several different fronts:

- **We Depend on Our Partners:** The City of Clifton, NJ is a benchmark example of partnership. Their Clean Communities Program won our National Award for Local Government Event in 2007. They have signed up 23 local schools as Take Pride in America Schools, and have been a perpetual source of outstanding citizen contribution. This one city has accounted for 1/5<sup>th</sup> of our entire Schools program, which is a national program. I feel almost bashful for even attempting to tie our

success in with Clifton Clean Communities – we provide them such little support, (absolutely nothing financially,) yet have the enterprise to incorporate their citizens, local groups, schools and businesses to transform their city into one in which they are all proud. Clifton is Take Pride in America in action and Clifton is Litter Free New Jersey in action. And I thank Clifton Mayor James Anzaldi, City Manager Al Greco, Clean Communities Coordinator Al Dubois, and everyone else in Clifton for their tremendous example.

- **We Place a Specific Focus on Retirees and School Groups**

Age and status should have no bearing on ability to contribute to our communities. Frankly, though, how many middle aged working Americans have the time, between work and family life, to volunteer on their public lands? Granted, there are many selfless folks that do contribute the little free time they have to community action, but most enjoy spending their leisure time relaxing, and weed pulling and littler pick-up naturally does not sound appealing! This is just the nature of our society and life. Rather than trying to push a weekend of volunteerism ad nauseam on your average citizen, I have found it much more effective to focus on those demographics that have the time and the drive to volunteer. Senior citizens are a tremendous resource of goodwill and service; for now we do not have a specific program designed to organize retiree efforts, because they basically do such good work themselves. We do however place a special emphasis on schools and children -

**Schools are our most important focus** – Secretary of the Interior Dirk Kempthorne and President Bush have made the fight against childhood obesity a priority. A current 5 day series culminates today in the Washington Post. It highlights the life-threatening plague of childhood obesity that our children face in this modern society. I could spend a great deal of time describing the effects this

phenomenon has on kids health, but our investment at Take Pride in America lies specifically within the *solution* to the problem. Secretary Kempthorne and the Department have decided that our branch of the battle is to encourage kids to get outdoors and back into Nature. Again, I'm pleased to reiterate that New Jersey has more schools signed up for Take Pride in America than any other State in the Union, by far. By getting kids into nature, which New Jersey is doing, we not only provide an arena for activity and exercise, but develop a sense of stewardship for their public lands to last them a lifetime. That is why the Take Pride Schools program is so important. The only requirement for the school is to perform 1 event a year. Take Pride in America will provide helpful materials and publicity for the event and school. I encourage all of you to discover our schools program and encourage every school in this great state to become a part of Take Pride Schools.

- **Volunteer Recognition is another major facet of Take Pride:**

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The best volunteers are usually tend to be individuals that don't need nor crave recognition for their good deeds. They are selfless and determined to make their communities more livable and beautiful places. Because these folks are ordinarily too humble to take credit for their own patronage, we are pleased to do it for them. Take Pride has a bevy of awards of all different levels and distinctions. We rely upon volunteer coordinators, friends, family and even self-recognizance to become aware of stellar volunteers, and are then happy to give them the acknowledgment they deserve. In a moment, I will bring up two outstanding citizen volunteers from Clifton, New Jersey, to present the President's Volunteer Service Award. It is always a true pleasure to meet and give tribute to individuals that truly embody the power of volunteerism.

*CONCLUSION*

**I'm anxious to bring our two tremendous volunteers up here** so I'll try to wrap up. Please visit Take Pride in America's website for more information on all our different programs at [www.takepride.gov](http://www.takepride.gov). There you can sign up schools, fill out nomination forms for awards, and gain a better sense of what we do.

Let me finish by stressing once again that the good work of our fellow concerned citizens must be supported, and the less we as government inhibit them, the better off our communities will be.

*Pause*

**Don't forget the power of partnership.** Public/ Private partnerships are crucial to large scale clean-up success – they can provide resources and manpower that loosely affiliated individuals cannot easily muster.

*Pause*

**Children are our greatest concern.** School and child involvement is not only nice, it's necessary. Let's make a push to get New Jersey kids outdoors and away from their Mp3 players, computers and video games for a little while. They'll thank us in the long run.

**And remember, at the end of the day,** it is imperative to recognize those that you lean on so heavily to do so much good work. This leads me to ask Cheryl Mauro and Cheryl Schweighardt of Clifton to join me on stage, along with Mayor Anzaldi, Al Greco, and Al Dubois.

*Pause, arrange guests on stage for awards presentation:*

You know, Cheryl Schweighardt made an excellent point when I spoke with her a few days ago: she said "Why is it that we have to wait for our communities to hit rock bottom before we spring into action" - Certainly a rhetorical and poignant question for us all to consider as we sit here today.

- **With Ms. Schweighardt's words of wisdom,** let me direct my comments to her now and say it is a true honor on behalf of President Bush to present to you the

Gold Presidential Volunteer Service Award. The Gold level designates that you have accomplished over 500 hours of service in the past year.

Cheryl earned this award by transforming a littered intersection near her home in Clifton. She cleaned up the large amounts of refuse, made a park out of the large island in the intersection, laid stonework, planted flowers and provided a beautiful and visible example of community action. They say imitation is the truest form of flattery: well I've heard that several other communities around the state have come to see and replicate Cheryl's hard work in their own towns. Thank you Cheryl for your amazing work, Clifton is lucky to have you.

- **Now for our other Cheryl:** Cheryl Mauro, it is my pleasure to present YOU with the Gold Presidential Volunteer Service Award as well.

Cheryl has led her Girl Scout and Brownie troops to clean parks, plant trees and flowers. She also painted fish and other animals around catch basins to alert the public on non-point source pollution to New Jersey Waterways. Over 850 hours of volunteer work have gone into these projects and many others, the last year alone.

Cheryl you understand how important it is to involve children with your great work, thank you for your tremendous service.

**Thank you all for allowing me your time,** and thank you to New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, the Clean Communities Council, and Mercer County for allowing me to talk about Take Pride in America for a bit. I'd like to give a special thank you to these two volunteers from Clifton, and I'd like you all to take note: apparently if you want the best volunteers in your towns,

just find every woman named Cheryl and go from there. *Let's give these two a round of applause And Thank You for Your Attention.*



*Cheryl Mauro*

*James Anzaldi (Mayor)*

*Justin Kientz*

