



Gloucester Daily Times

City hopes local art will bring a cleaner ocean

By Abigail Bliss Staff Writer
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This fall, the Gloucester Clean City Commission, Seaside Sustainability and One Ocean One Love are teaming with local artists to transform storm drains into thought-provoking art and limit debris flowing into the ocean.

The citywide initiative, Drain smART Gloucester, aims to highlight the connection between storm drains and local waterways. It is funded by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Marine Debris Program, the National Marine Sanctuary Foundation and the New England Grassroots Environmental Fund.

Drain smART Gloucester was inspired by a similar project run by Salem Sound Coastwatch in that city.

Josh Sheridan, an intern at Seaside Sustainability, recalled a painted drain in Salem that sparked the same awareness he hopes the Gloucester murals will inspire.

“There was a mural of someone’s hand filled with garbage and cigarette butts right over the drain, as if it were being dumped in,” he said. “I saw it as interesting and provocative, showing the human impact on our oceans.”

When debris -- including cigarette butts, plastic bags and chemical runoff -- flows through storm drains and into the ocean, the marine ecosystems Gloucester depends upon are put at risk, he said.

“We’re motivated by the local communities,” explained Sheridan, “Especially Gloucester, where the main industries rely on the ocean. We’re working hard to keep the harbor clean for future generations.”

The initiative will also highlight the unique artistic talent the city has to offer.

“We want to keep this on the community level and would encourage anyone from high school students to professional artists to get involved,” said Ainsley Smith, chair of the Gloucester Clean City Commission.

Seaside Sustainability Executive Director Eric Magers agreed.

“I’m excited to continue to make partnerships that are important to the longevity of our efforts to keep our waters clean, and to meet people concerned about our city and its beautification,” he said.

Smith said she hoped the murals would catch the attention of pedestrians and passersby, and prompt them to form a connection between the trash tossed in the street and its negative effects on the ocean.

“Hopefully, people will think twice about dropping their bags or cigarettes in the street or in storm drains as they’re walking around,” she said.

Drain smART Gloucester hopes to see four to six murals installed this fall and will continue the initiative in the spring and summer of next year when weather permits. In total, there are 30 drains that have been scoped for murals. As Smith said, “There is no shortage of storm drains. There are plenty of great canvasses.”

Artists interested in contributing their talents to the initiative may submit their ideas for a mural online at <https://www.seasidesustainability.org/drain-smart>. Drain smArt will provide paint and additional necessary materials to artists with winning ideas, who will register for a two-week slot to complete their mural. For additional information, email drainsmart@seasidesustainability.org.