

Officials work hours on project

By Christina Fuoco, Independent Newspapers

The city of Apache Junction has buckled down on the influx of graffiti throughout Apache Junction by dedicating 40 hours a week to erasing the gang-inspired vandalism.



“We’re going to be doing this all day, 40 hours a week. It’s basically a one-man operation,” the Department of Public Works’ Maintenance Supervisor Greg Mayer said Wednesday, Nov. 9. “It’s probably going to be going on for the next two to three weeks.”

He showcased the city’s new formula for ridding block walls and other property of graffiti on a wall at 20th Avenue and Del Rio Nov. 9. He came across the process by accident.

Usually the city uses a product called Scram-It, however, Mr. Mayer found it was on back order. Mr. Mayer asked the distributor if he could recommend another solution and he suggested Tagaway, something Mr. Mayer said works better.

“I really like this stuff. It looks like it’s doing the job,” he said.

Public Works employees, such as Martin Steen, maintenance worker 2, applies Tagaway, lets it sit and then slowly power washes the surface. It can be a tedious process. Mr. Mayer explained that it took three days to remove graffiti from a 300-foot brick wall behind Diamond Shamrock at Southern Avenue and Ironwood Drive.

After graffiti is reported to Public Works or the Police Department, homeowners are given release forms to sign because sometimes the removal process can cause damage, Mr. Mayer said.

“It’s to protect us. The pressure washer can do a little damage, a little scarring. It’s better than looking at the paint,” Mr. Mayer said.

He said the increase in graffiti has been frustrating.

“Some of this is just kids. Sometimes the police department goes out just to see if it is gang related,” Mr. Mayer said.

Mark Mingura of Gilbert heard the rattling of the power washer and stopped by to inquire. He owns three properties at 20th Avenue and Del Rio and has become increasingly frustrated with the graffiti in the area. Mr. Mingura said he has seen “a little” graffiti in the last year and a half but recently it hit his side of Del Rio.

“I was getting ready to call them myself,” Mr. Mingura said about the city offices. “Or I was going to paint the walls myself. I didn’t know if they had a task force. It’s good that they’re on it. The best way to combat it is to clean it immediately.”

Mr. Mingura explained that while living in California his employer had a problem with graffiti. Routinely he would ask his employees to paint over it the morning after it was vandalized.

Meanwhile, a Gold Canyon man who volunteers as a Guardian Angel, has offered his group’s services to patrol Apache Junction for graffiti vandals. The New York-based volunteer organization was founded by Curtis Sliwa, a former McDonald’s manager, in the late 1970s. One-year Gold Canyon resident Brodie Broderson decided to take on the task after reading the story about Tom Sullivan and his fight with graffiti in last week’s Independent.

“We’ve handled this sort of thing in countless cities and towns. We would like to patrol it (the city) and find out who’s the good guys and who’s the bad guys and then try to get the city involved,” Mr. Broderson said.

“He’s got the nicest house in the whole area,” Mr. Broderson said of Mr. Sullivan. “You can tell there are a bunch of wild characters around there. We will go in and take possession. When they (vandals) want to do something like write on the walls, we’ll stop them, make a citizen’s arrest and call the police. If they run, we try to stop them.”

Mr. Broderson said he is awaiting a call back from Mr. Sliwa and other Guardian Angels organizers for permission to take on the Apache Junction project.

He added that he is planning to speak to the City Council at Call to the Public during its meeting at 7 p.m. Tuesday, Nov. 15, at City Council chambers, 300 E. Superstition Blvd. At the City Council’s work session on Monday, Nov. 14, it was expected to hear a presentation about the city’s Graffiti Abatement Program.

Mr. Sullivan, who lives at 18th Avenue and Apache Drive, said the Public Works Department came out and removed the graffiti from his block walls on Thursday, Nov. 10. However, when a code enforcement agent inspected the area, she said she didn’t like the way it was done, he said. Mr. Sullivan said she told him that Public Works would return to improve upon its job.

The graffiti in Mr. Sullivan's alley referenced a gang called S.F.H., or S-t Faced Hustlers. He said that on Wednesday, Nov. 9, a neighbor came over and offered the identification of the person who vandalized the wall. Mr. Sullivan gave the person's name to the Apache Junction Police Department, which is investigating the case.

"I will press charges against him because they have to be stopped. All they're trying to do is scare people," Mr. Sullivan said.

"I'm going to repaint the wall. I hope in the meantime that they catch him. I'm afraid that I'm going to go through this hard work and they're going to come back and do it again. I hope they can get them," he added.