

Canal cleaning, anyone? While others play, éco-Quartier group channels its efforts

CHRISTOPHER MAUGHAN

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While many people were enjoying walks through parks and picnics under the sun, Marie-Anne Perreault spent her Sunday afternoon picking up garbage - and loved it.

"It's a beautiful way to spend an afternoon," she said.

"It's a really nice day to be out, and we're having a lot of fun."

Perreault was in the Lachine Canal yesterday in a kayak, participating in Éco-Quartier Louis Cyr's "Gar Barge" event. Armed with garbage bags and plastic gloves, she and about 20 other people took to the water to pick up trash collecting along the canal's banks.

"It's a fun way to encourage our volunteers to get out," said France De Montigny, the St. Henri Éco-Quartier's local co-ordinator.

They started seeing results almost as soon as they hit the water.

"We haven't even been here for 10 minutes and we've collected all these plastic bags and an empty case of beer," said Perreault, laughing as she fended off another volunteer struggling to control her boat.

De Montigny said Éco-Quartier's new project is important because there are many spots along the canal that Parks Canada employees can't reach when they walk the shoreline.

"Over there, by the reeds, it's too steep and trash just builds up and gets all tangled."

Kayaks for the day were provided by H2O Adventures, a local rental company.

Kristy Franks, one of H2O's instructors, said it's frustrating that people don't take greater care to keep the canal clean.

"When you're paddling and you see a dead fish beside a beer bottle beside who knows what else, it's pretty frustrating."

Franks said it's hard to believe how much junk has been pulled out of the canal over the years.

"One of our members once pulled in something that looked like an engine," she said. "People have brought in spray-paint cans, shoes, all kinds of stuff."

All that stuff was eventually sorted into recyclables and trash and disposed of locally.

De Montigny's project is in its first year. She said she hopes it becomes an annual event that will create a sense of pride in a clean canal.

"Maybe if it's nice and clean, people will think twice before they throw their garbage there."

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