



This litter bugs

Fed-up crew sweeps UWS streets

By JANE RIDLEY

Garbage bags at the ready, a growing number of fed-up Manhattan residents are cleaning the Upper West Side — one block at a time.

Appalled by the litter and filth in a neighborhood troubled by quality of life complaints, a crew of around 400 New Yorkers has taken to the streets to pick up everything from discarded food cartons to broken umbrellas.

The idea is for each set of volunteers to “adopt” a block and clean it twice a week.

“A lot of it has come out of COVID-19 and feelings of powerlessness on what can be done to help,” said Jake Russell, 30, co-founder of the new Facebook organization OneBlockUWS which is behind the initiative. “But picking up trash is a relatively easy thing for an ordinary person to do for their community.”

He started out solo in mid-August by taking just 15 minutes to clean his own block — 76th Street between Columbus and Amsterdam avenues — after buying a trash grabber and plastic bags from a local hardware store.

“Some passersby asked me what I was doing and thanked me,” Russell said. “It felt good to know I was doing my part.”

Russell posted about his impromptu voluntary work on Facebook and the reaction was universally positive. When more like-minded people began asking if they could join in, the real estate tech professional saw the potential for a movement.

“It really took off,” he said. “I couldn’t believe the number of in-



TRASH TALK: An all-volunteer brigade of about 400 Upper West Side residents, led by Jake Russell (second from right), has “adopted” blocks they clean twice a week.

quiries I received.”

One came from Douglas Elliman real estate supremo Ann Cutbill Lenane, 57, who advertises herself with the slogan “Annie Gets It Done.” Dismayed by the piles of trash blighting the charm of the Upper West Side, she had already considered spearheading some kind of mass cleanup operation.

“There have been a series of budget cuts to the Sanitation Department and it really shows,” Lenane told The Post. “As a concerned and motivated citizen, it made sense for me to join forces with Jake to form OneBlockUWS.”

“It’s wonderful to watch all these New Yorkers come together and make change happen.”

The project mirrors other bids

to restore the beauty of the city, including one by staffers at three Upper West Side diners who have been sweeping the dirty sidewalks of Broadway between 90th and 100th streets on a daily basis.

Since its creation on Aug. 24, OneBlockUWS has expanded dramatically. The group plans to hire three paid cleanup workers, in partnership with the Association of Community Employment Programs for the Homeless (ACE), to supplement the work of the volunteers.

As for those donating their free time to the cause, Russell estimates there are about 400 active participants. Registration via a Google doc prevents the doubling up of efforts, and every block but

three between 70th Street and 96th Street west of Central Park has been targeted.

The team has also organized weekend cleanup campaigns in parks and playgrounds. Volunteers should show up wearing gloves, closed-toe shoes and, if possible, a green T-shirt to set them apart from other parkgoers.

One such cleaner-upper, Tarek Nakla, 61, signed up for OneBlockUWS last week, and is proud to wield his trash grabber around 90th Street between Broadway and Amsterdam.

“The whole deal of cleaner streets adding to the quality of life is very important,” he said. “Especially during the challenging times we are facing now.”