

INSIDE AURORA: A Space of Waste

By Scott Johnston

?I would like to thank you all for joining us here today, as we prepare for the annual Mayor's Anti-Litter Clean-up Day on April 20th.?

The students who had assembled at Town Hall settled down and shifted their attention to the speaker at the front of the room.

?Now, normally we'd just meet outside and start working, but in this case, there's a bit of a demonstration required.?

?I didn't realize you needed special training to pick up trash,? came a voice in the back to some chuckles.

?Just watch.? The man at the front reached for an empty Styrofoam coffee cup on his desk.

?First, you take the piece of garbage,? he said, brandishing the cup, ?and drop it on the ground.?

Confused silence greeted this demonstration.

?Then, you take your next piece of litter, and do it again, but not in the same place.? He shifted over a few feet and dropped a crumpled up ball of paper. ?You need to spread it around a bit to look convincing.?

Several hands went up.

?In fact,? he continued, matching a stomping motion to his words, ?to make it realistic, you may even want to grind it into the ground a bit, too.?

The comments all came at once.

?What the ??

?I don't understand.?

?Wait a minute.?

?Isn't this exercise to clean-up Aurora??

?Normally, yes,? the instructor said, leaning back against the table at the front of the room. ?But this time's different. You see, every year we have an annual Mayor's Clean-up Day. Lots of people helping out, photos ops, the whole deal. And it does make a big difference in removing all of the debris that we find when the snow melts.?

?The problem is that with the warmer weather over the past few weeks, some people have taken it upon themselves to get started early and clean up the green spaces near their homes. They've done such a great job, the town is immaculate.?

?Isn't that a good thing?? asked a student.

?Unfortunately, the Town's invested a lot of time and effort into the Mayor's Clean-up Day next week. We have sponsors lined up, residents enrolled, materials on hand, the barbeque all arranged?and if the volunteers went out and found the Town already spotless, we'd lose the photo ops, and no one would want to participate again next year.?

?So, we're arranged this special day ahead of time to re-mess things up a bit.?

?Don't worry,? he reassured, ?we won't be throwing around tons of garbage, just enough to be convincing. And everything has been carefully chosen to be large and easy to pick up, such a coffee cups, pizza boxes, and pop cans.?

?In fact,? he said, pointing towards several large recycling bins at the back of the room, ?you can even choose what you want to dispose of.?

?And don't worry about the bylaw folks,? he whispered conspiratorially. ?They won't be ticketing litterers in town today.?

Again, there was silence, as the bewildered participants looked at each other.

?If there are no more questions, you can pick up your supplies and head out to your pre-arranged locations.?

As the student who had joked about needing training picked up a handful of juice cartons from a bin at the back, he shook his head. He normally wouldn't do such a far-fetched activity, but he couldn't pass up on the volunteer participation hours he'd get credit for.

In fact, he thought, that's probably why none of the other students had left after they found out what they'd be doing, either.

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