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OUR VIEWS

A cleaner Downtown

Probationers program is making a big difference

Many parts of Downtown are visibly cleaner these days and it's not costing taxpayers a dime. When a public-private partnership benefits the community, it not only deserves kudos but stands as an example for other projects. Such is the case with the litter and graffiti cleanup agreement between the Downtown Management District and the county's adult probation department.

This program has a two-pronged appeal. First, probationers who have cost taxpayers money by breaking laws and ending up in the criminal-justice system are paying a kind of community restitution. And second, that a private entity proactively stepped in to help solve a problem that affects its membership (Downtown merchants) and is paying the salaries of professional probation staffers who supervise the daily cleanups.

This is far more individualized

litter attention for Downtown than the city ever was able to provide.

Adult probationers are working in Downtown 120 hours a week. Since the program began in November 1998 and through August 1999, the crews have provided 26,122 hours of service. They've collected 23,092 bags of trash and 27,146 cardboard boxes. They've cleaned 461,000 square feet of public property and have removed 112 graffiti tags and hand painted another 216 graffiti spots.

The Downtown Management District and the probation department earn plaudits for working to create a program that's remarkably responsive to the community. Downtown merchants experiencing litter problems can contact Mike Breitingner at 533-2656. Public and nonprofit agencies interested in working with probationers can contact the adult probation office at 546-8120.