



**Application for
2012 J. Robert Havlick and Thomas H. Muehlenbeck Awards**

**Town of Colma
Scoopy Doo:
Our Humorous Solution to a Serious Dog Poo Problem**

**Laura Allen
City Manager
Town of Colma
1198 El Camino Real
Colma, CA 94014
Phone: 650-997-8318
Fax: 650-997-8308
Email: laura.allen@colma.ca.gov**

Program name and short description

The Town initiated a dog waste pick-up awareness campaign to address recurring complaints from residents regarding dog waste on neighborhood sidewalks. The program, named after its mascot "Scoopy Doo," takes a humorous approach to the serious issue of dog waste on Colma's sidewalks.

The interdepartmental team formed to address the Town's dog waste problem created the program. Using the program's mascot, "Scoopy Doo" (a part-time recreation leader in a dog costume) as its inspiration, the team created the awareness campaign which included a slogan (Scoopy Doo says...Clean up after your pet. It's just good *petiquette!*), button design, signs for the dog waste bag dispensers and 3X5 cards with six reasons why dog owners should pick up after their pets.

Scoopy Doo first appeared in October of 2009 and continues to be a prominent feature at Town events including the E-Waste Recycling Day and Halloween Parade, as well as the Recreation Services Department summer and winter day camps.

The program eliminated the persistent issue of complaints from residents about dog waste on residential sidewalks. Colma dog owners are picking up after their pets as Scoopy Doo asks. After all it's just good *petiquette!*

Description of jurisdiction

The Town of Colma, known worldwide as the "City of Souls," is the smallest city in San Mateo County, California with 1,600 residents — and 1.5 million "souls." However, Colma is more than just 16 cemeteries.

Colma's commercial buildings make a distinct architectural statement resulting from design standards that encourage Spanish-Mediterranean motifs. Within its two-square miles, the Town enjoys a strong tax base with one of Northern California's most complete collections of car dealerships, two shopping centers, and a cardroom.

The Town of Colma's five-member City Council sets government and planning policies for the Town. This small-town approach to modern, municipal government reflects a commitment to both a healthy business climate and a harmonious relationship with residents. While the Town has a small residential population, its attractive retail shopping options draw a large number of visitors to Colma, especially during the holiday season.

History of the situation which gave rise to the innovation's need, and additional underlying factors

Before Scoopy Doo, the Town received persistent complaints about dog owners not picking up after their dogs, especially in the spring at the end of the rainy season. In 2004, the Town adopted an ordinance which made it unlawful for dog owners to leave feces on public sidewalks and other public areas. From 2005 – 2008 different approaches were taken to resolve the issue as it periodically flared up. Staff added statements in various issues of LiveWire (the monthly community newsletter) encouraging dog owners to pick up after their pets, and increased the

number of dog waste bag dispensers, checking them frequently to ensure they had bags. In spite of these efforts the complaints continued and as a result the Town took a stronger enforcement stance. Police Officers and the Community Services Officer (CSO) were directed to shift their focus when patrolling residential areas in an effort to catch dog owners in the act of leaving their dog's waste behind (pun intended). While they were prepared to ticket dog owners who left dog poo on Town sidewalks, no tickets were issued.

At the April 2009 Council City meeting, a long-time resident complained at the public comment period about the amount of dog waste on Town sidewalks. He wanted to walk his grandchildren to school without stepping in it. He yelled at the Council to "clean that (insert four-letter word for dog poo) up!"

As the recently appointed City Manager, I was determined to resolve the issue which, I learned after interviewing several long-term residents, had persisted for over 15 years. Inspired by my experiences in the Leadership ICMA program which exposed me to the work of Daniel Pink, I challenged Town staff to take a different tack.

Describe the innovation's importance, internal impact, and community benefits. What was the environment in which the innovation was created and sustained?

Scoopy Doo increased resident awareness of the need to pick up after their dogs effectively eliminating a 15-year problem, and enhancing the appearance of the community. The Town spent a little bit of money, and a lot of creative energy to solve a persistent problem. Staff time that was spent on dog poo complaints is now directed to strategic issues. The Council's expectation that the Police Officers and Community Services Officer will ticket resident dog owners into compliance has dissipated. Town staff gained confidence in their ability to solve problems creatively; although the risk was small, it paid off as the community embraced the program.

How is it a quantum leap of creativity?

Scoopy Doo makes picking up dog poo fun! The program is a quantum leap of creativity because we took a dirty, messy, stinky problem (dog poo on Town sidewalks), poked fun at it (when Scoopy Doo walks the community or shows up at community events, people giggle; they can't help themselves) and got resident dog owners to change their behavior which improved the quality of life in our community.

Who has benefited from the innovation?

Colma residents can walk their neighborhood sidewalks without having to navigate dog waste. The City Council no longer hears complaints from residents about dog waste on sidewalks. The long-time resident who came to the Council meeting sent a thank you letter to the Council and the City Manager for creating the program. Town staff received several compliments from other residents for creating a successful program.

How was the innovation initiated and implemented?

The program was launched in October of 2009 by having Scoopy Doo walk the neighborhood handing out dog waste pick-up bags, treats for the dogs (biscuits shaped like dog bones) and candy for their owners (baggies of tootsie rolls!). Seeing a person in a dog costume walk through the neighborhood drew a lot of attention as people came out of their houses to see what was going on; Scoopy Doo talked to approximately 25 people that first day. This was a different way of creating public awareness about an issue – using humor rather than nagging or ticketing in an effort to gain compliance. Later that same month, Scoopy Doo led the Halloween parade. Scoopy Doo attends the Recreation Services Department summer and winter day camps (for children ages 5 – 12), talking to resident children about the importance of picking up after their dog. Scoopy Doo is also prominently featured at annual Town events such as the E-Waste Recycling and Town-wide Cleanup and Garage Sale.

What risks were associated with planning and developing the innovation?

The risk of failure in this context was really low because the Town had tried several other approaches and the problem was beginning to be perceived as unsolvable. If Scoopy Doo did not resolve the issue, it's likely the Town would have contracted with a private company to pick up the waste instead. The low-risk environment made it easier for staff to stretch creatively because the downside was so small.

What were execution costs and savings?

Creating Scoopy Doo was not expensive. The Town spent approximately \$130 on the dog costume and approximately \$200 producing the buttons, flyers, and purchasing dog treats. Several hours of staff time were spent developing the concept and fine tuning it.

What lessons were learned that could be shared with other local governments?

1. Creative energy is a great alternative to spending money.
2. Every problem, no matter how persistent, has a solution.
3. Humor can motivate people to change their behavior.

Which department and/or individuals championed the innovation?

The interdepartmental team consisted of the Recreation Services Director, Planning Director, administrative support staff from the City Manager's Office and the City Manager.

Informational Flyer

Front

Scoopy Doo says...



Clean up after your pet.
It's just good *petiquette!*

Back

More reasons to clean up after your pet:

- ✚ It's easy! Pet waste bag dispensers and garbage cans are located throughout the Sterling Park neighborhood.
- ✚ Pet waste in our Town is unsightly and stinks!
- ✚ Pet waste left on sidewalks can end up on your shoes.
- ✚ Pet waste is not a good fertilizer and is harmful to plants.
- ✚ Pet waste left on the ground gets washed into storm drains harming fish and other aquatic life.
- ✚ It's just good *petiquette!*



Event Photos



Scoopy Doo at our Winter Day Camp.



(Above) Scoopy Doo and a Recreation Leader lead the Halloween Parade. (Left) Director of Recreation Services, Brian Dossey with Scoopy Doo at the Eggstravaganza.