

Keep Gastonia Beautiful

2025
ANNUAL
REPORT

WHO WE ARE

Keep Gastonia Beautiful Mission

Our mission is to make the community at large knowledgeable and responsible in natural resource conservation, solid waste handling, recycling, litter abatement, and beautification.

Keep Gastonia Beautiful, Inc. is an affiliate of Keep America Beautiful, Inc., which is a national non-profit, public education organization dedicated to protecting natural beauty and improving waste handling practices in American communities. Keep America Beautiful, Inc. continues to educate millions of Americans on all aspects of waste handling and beautification practices, improving quality of life issues across the country.

Our major goals for the future will focus on enhancing the appearance of our community and expanding and improving our "green" efforts.



KEEP GASTONIA BEAUTIFUL, INC.

KEEP AMERICA BEAUTIFUL AFFILIATE



BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Ellen Aiken

Brad Best

Bill Blackwelder

Sam Braxton

Jim Burke

Rebecca Edison

Alvin Ellison

Sandy DeMarco

Emily Ehinger

Kristi Ferguson

Dana Harper

Angie Karchmer

Nan Kirlin

Meghan LeCroy

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Deanna Matthews

Elena Mejia

Cary Rodriguez

Suzanne Simmons

Craig Singer

Brittany Stroupe

Penny Thompson

Annastacia Tooke

Pam Underwood

Keep Gastonia Beautiful Staff

Juliann Lehman, Administrator

Lana DuPont, Grants Manager

Jeffie Hardin, Community Engagement Coordinator

Julie Heath, Special Projects

Becca Hurd, Education Coordinator

Barney Huddleston, In-House Recycling Technician



2025 ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Fundraisers

Through the generosity of the community we yielded \$35,068.25 through our various fundraising efforts

- Black Gold Sales - \$27,856
- City Employee Golf Tournament - \$7,212.25

Inhouse Recycling Stats

- Collected 34,716 pounds/17.358 tons of cardboard/office paper from city departments, recycled at Sonoco which diverted them from the landfill

Shred Day Events

- April and November events collected 22,920 pounds/11.45 tons of sensitive documents that were diverted out of the landfill and sent to Sonoco to be recycled.
- Goodwill yielded 4,038 pounds of electronics diverted from the landfill to be recycled, 40% increase from 2024
- These 2 events served over 680 citizens



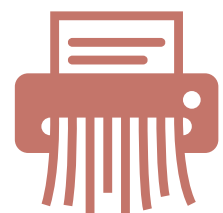
\$35,068.25

Fundraisers



34,716 pounds

Collected through
our In-House
Recycling efforts



22,920 pounds

*Sensitive
documents
shredded*

LITTER IMPACTS

Litter Cleanups

- Riversweep at Lineberger Park
 - Collected 952 pounds of trash with the help of 22 volunteers
- Roadside Cleanups
 - Non-profits, neighborhoods, city staff, county staff, local businesses and school groups
 - Collected: 4,809 pounds of trash cleaned up with the help of 596 volunteers

Staffing 360 (formerly Trinity Hands)

- Contracted services provided by City of Gastonia that collect trash along the city right of ways, greatly decreasing litter on major thoroughfares
- Collected 2,658 bags of litter off the roadways



5,761 pounds

*Total
documented
litter collected*



618

Total Volunteers



2,658 bags

*Total number of
bags collected by
Staffing 360*

RECYCLING EFFORTS TENNIS BALLS

In 2025, Keep Gastonia Beautiful successfully diverted **5,060** tennis balls from the landfill through a creative reuse partnership with the local Racquet Club. After tournament play, used tennis balls are collected and redistributed to area schools that sign up to participate in the program.

Schools place the tennis balls on the bottoms of classroom chairs and tables, helping to protect flooring, reduce noise, and create a more comfortable learning environment for students and teachers.



Each Tennis Ball weighs 2 ounces, so over 630 pounds of tennis balls were diverted from our landfill to be repurposed!

RECYCLING EFFORTS BAGS TO BENCHES

How it started and how we have grown!

Keep Gastonia Beautiful is kicking off Year 3 of our Bags to Benches program on November 14, 2025 — turning plastic film into community benches through Trex! For every 1,000 pounds of film collected (like grocery bags, bread bags, and case wrap), Trex donates a bench made from recycled material.

This is a partnership between Gaston County Solid Waste and Keep Gastonia Beautiful. TREX® sponsors local recycling programs in communities throughout the country. This has been an incredible partnership and we see that those who are participating are excited to have a space to properly recycle this hard to recycle item.

Last collection cycle, we gathered 2,800 pounds — and even shared hundreds with local partners so they could reach their own goals!

We're thrilled to see more groups joining in to gain a bench for their organization.

- Working on 2nd bench: Gaston County Master Gardeners, Covenant Village, Pisgah ARP
- Working on 1st bench: Stowe Conservancy, Sisters of Mercy, and a Mt. Holly Girl Scout Troop



6

Number of organizations that have joined the efforts



2,800 lbs.

of Plastic Film Collected



1 Bench

Number of Benches Acquired for KGB this year

PUBLIC ART INSTALLATION

Armstrong Park Road Mural

Location: Armstrong Park Road on the opposite side of 2912 Rousseau Court

Commissioned piece by Raman Bhardwaj

Installed: March 2025

Huge thanks to the organizations that believed in this project and provided grant funding for this massive mural project during the previous calendar year.

- Gaston Arts Council - \$2,500
- Rotary East Club - \$750
- City of Gastonia Art Committee - \$10,000



GRANTS

Native Seedlings Grant

- \$500 grant to purchase native tree seedlings. Gave away 500 seedlings to the community



**NATIONAL
WILDLIFE
FEDERATION**



GRANTS/FUNDING FOR COMMUNITY GARDEN SPACE

The following funds were secured in 2025 to further enhance our Community Garden and is being used to turn the unused space on the property into a pocket park for the community to use.

- Gaston County DHHS: \$4,396 for benches
- State Employees Credit Union: \$1,000
- AARP: \$15,000
- The Carrie E. and Leva V. Glenn Foundation: \$9,000
- Gaston Community Foundation: \$10,000
- Gaston Arts Council: \$8,300



Gaston
Community
Foundation



VISION FOR THE GARDEN/ POCKET PARK

The Aunt Charlotte McClee Community Garden and Pocket Park will transform an underused wooded lot into a culturally inspired, accessible community space that celebrates local history and promotes environmental education. Funded by more than \$57,700 in grants across 2024–2025, the project includes significant site improvements, community engagement features, and new public art.

Key components include:

Garden Expansion (completed Spring 2025): New pathways were created in the garden, additional beds were added both inside and outside to create areas outside of the garden for more community usage through the sharing of herbs and flowers to cut.

Site Restoration: Clearing the back of the wooded lot with a complete plan for renovation will allow the space to support year-round community use.

COMING SPRING 2026

Creative Shade Structures: Designing and installing of culturally inspired shade elements that will reflect African American quilting traditions.

Creative Art Feature: Artist-designed and painted 4x4 poles based on selected quilt codes, telling the story of the Underground Railroad and the neighborhood's heritage.

Community Engagement Elements: Creation of pathways, gathering area, and signage that will enhance learning and foster neighborhood pride. Creation of gathering areas that will create a safe and welcoming destination for residents of all ages.

When complete, the garden and pocket park will provide a vibrant community asset, honoring the Highland Neighborhood's legacy while offering opportunities for education, environmental stewardship, and neighborhood connection.

GROW THE GARDEN

COMPLETED SPRING 2025

Before



After



WATCH THE POCKET PARK TRANSFORMATION



WATCH THE POCKET PARK TRANSFORMATION



ENGAGEMENT SPOTLIGHT: MOSAIC STEPPING STONES

Through support from an AARP grant, Keep Gastonia Beautiful hosted a series of mosaic workshops during the summer to increase community engagement in the upcoming community garden renovation project. The workshops intentionally reused leftover tiles from a previously installed mosaic art piece at the stadium, giving materials a second life through creative reuse.

Participants took part in a hands-on lesson to design mosaic stepping stones, creating individual pieces to take home while also collaborating on a shared stepping stone that will be permanently installed in the community garden. This collaborative piece will serve as a lasting symbol of creativity, stewardship, and community partnership.

The workshops successfully combined art, sustainability, and intergenerational engagement, reinforcing the garden as a space shaped by and for the community.



HIGHLAND SCHOOL OF TECHNOLOGY Interns

In 2025, Keep Gastonia Beautiful benefited from the support of two dedicated interns who collectively contributed more than 100 volunteer hours to advance the organization's mission.

Together, these internships expanded organizational capacity, strengthened educational outreach, and helped lay the groundwork for future programming.



Luna Peterkin, Spring 2025

Luna supported the successful Arbor Day Tree Giveaway by developing clear, accessible educational materials on how to properly plant and care for each tree species distributed. She also assisted with a variety of spring preparation projects that strengthened seasonal programming and community readiness.

Madison Darnell, Fall 2025

Madison worked on a Spring 2026 looking initiative, creating tree education content to be featured along local greenways. In addition, she supported social media efforts and assisted with special projects that enhanced public engagement and assisted with some Stormwater awareness.



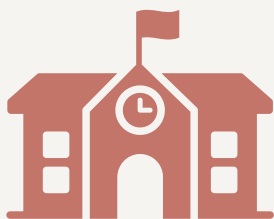
ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

January -December 2025

Keep Gastonia Beautiful delivers environmental education that connects classroom learning to real-world concepts and empowers students to help create a cleaner, greener, and more sustainable community. Our programming focuses primarily on elementary-aged students and emphasizes topics such as litter prevention, recycling, trees and pollinators, stormwater protection, and everyday stewardship practices.

In calendar year 2025, we achieved a 10 percent increase in environmental education programming compared to 2024 and reached a total of 10,470 students through school presentations, puppet characters, interactive demonstrations, and community learning events. This continued growth reflects the strong demand for hands-on environmental literacy and our commitment to building the next generation of environmental stewards.

To learn more about our School Year 25/26 Programming Check out School Booklet [HERE](#)



26

Number of different Schools in Gaston County reached*

**public/private/charter*



10,470

Number of students educated*

**Some schools book multiple programs for their grade level*

ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION PARTICIPATION BY GRADE LEVEL

January -December 2025

Louie the Litterbug Programs (K-1)

Keep Gastonia Beautiful reached 2,146 Kindergarten and First Grade students with Louie the Litterbug, our introductory litter-prevention and stewardship program.

1st Grade 2,708 students participated in three hands-on programs: Plant a Seed, Earth Bracelets, Busy as a Bee

2nd Grade 1,103 students engaged in programs including: Where Water Wonders, Recycling 101, Eyes on Nature, Where Does Our Food Come From?

3rd Grade 762 students participated in: Quest for Less, Project Pollinator, Waste Detectives

4th Grade 919 students completed programs such as: Farm to Table, Be the Change, Wondering About Water

5th Grade 679 students participated in: Vermicomposting



PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT:

Robinson Elementary Outdoor Learning Day

In Fall 2025, Keep Gastonia Beautiful partnered with Robinson Elementary School to deliver a full day of outdoor environmental education for all Kindergarten through 2nd grade students. The program utilized the school's newly installed raised garden space to bring classroom concepts to life through hands-on learning.

Students rotated through interactive stations that included planting in the garden beds, learning about vermicomposting, creating rock art for the garden, and participating in garden-themed yoga.

A huge thank you to the Master Gardener Volunteers of Gaston County for donating seeds from their Seed Banks (available at every Gaston County Public Library branch!) and to Deep Roots CPS Farm for providing strawberry plants that will be ready to harvest at the end of the school year.



ACCOLADES AND AWARDS

The Chronolog time-lapse monitoring project, a partnership between Keep Gastonia Beautiful and the City of Gastonia Stormwater Utilities Division, received two major awards in 2025 recognizing innovation, collaboration, and environmental impact.

Keep America Beautiful Merit Award ***Local Partnerships***

Honoring the strength of collaboration between Keep Gastonia Beautiful and the City of Gastonia Stormwater Division to advance public engagement, environmental monitoring, and education.

Centralina Region of Excellence Award ***Local Government Innovation***

Recognizing the Chronolog project as an innovative approach to stormwater education, data collection, and community awareness.

These awards underscore the value of cross-department partnerships and highlight how creative environmental programming can support data-driven decision-making and public education.

As a reminder, devices are installed at Rankin Lake (on the bridge between the Clubhouse and the Lake) and the Greenway at Lineberger Park (after the bridge and before Forest Drive).



340 pictures

Total number captured since installation



92

Number of unique citizen science contributors

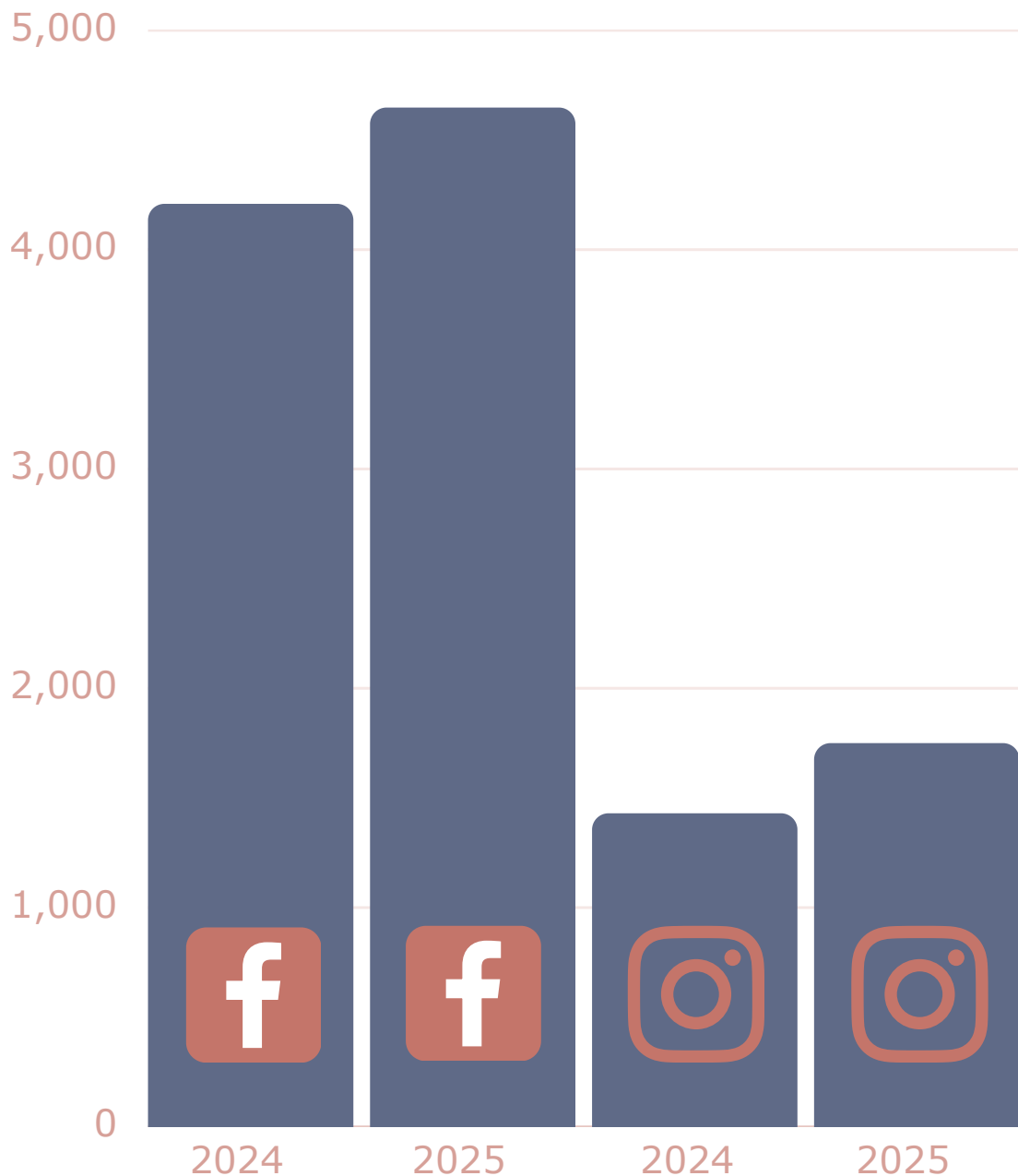
SOCIAL MEDIA STATS

4,648

2025 Facebook

1,750

2025 Instagram



COST BENEFITS

1,610

Total number of
Volunteer Hours

\$34.79

Current Estimated National Value of Each Volunteer Hour

1,070*

Total number of volunteers

*Number does not take into account some
people volunteer at multiple events

*We ♥ our
Volunteers*

KEEP GASTONIA BEAUTIFUL BRIEF HISTORY

Founding and Early Programs (1977–1990)

- Started as Clean City became an affiliate of Keep America Beautiful
- Introduced Yard of the Week, newspaper recycling, and the first community cleanup programs
- Held the City's first Arbor Day celebration

Expansion of Beautification and Education (1991–2010)

- Launched Swat-a-Litterbug, Twiggy the Talking Tree, Louie the Litterbug
- Renamed to Keep Gastonia Beautiful (1997)
- Planted thousands of trees citywide
- Added public art installations and won "Cool Cities" recognition

Growth, Art, and Community Spaces (2011–2020)

- Major public artworks installed (Marbles on Main, Ghillie Dhu, Discursus)
- Started Highland Community Garden and Adopt-a-Street
- Earned Bee City USA designation and launched Beetopia programming
- Expanded recycling programs and created COVID-era community engagement initiatives

Innovation, Grants, & Green Infrastructure (2021–2025)

- Secured more than \$100,000 in grants for pollinators, gardens, murals, and storytelling
- Upgraded Highland Community Garden and Farmers Market amenities (mural, educational beds, tractor, Truck sign at the road, etc.)
- Installed multiple murals and public art pieces
- Reached major community education and recycling milestones
- Rethinking and renovating the Aunt Charlotte McClee Garden/Pocket Park project

