



Palo Alto launches reusable-bag campaign

After enacting a plastic-bag ban, city now looks to promote cloth totes over paper bags

by **Royston Sim**
Palo Alto Online Staff

Plastic bags officially drifted out of Palo Alto grocery stores last Friday, and now the city's trying to help shoppers remember to bring their own reusable bags whenever they shop.

The Bring Your Own Bag campaign, launched in the parking lot outside Piazza's Fine Foods Wednesday morning, was the city's first step.

"Even for me, it took about a year to adopt it as an ingrained habit," said City Council member Yoriko Kishimoto, who spoke at the event along with city Director of Public Works Glenn Roberts.

Besides Piazza's, the plastic-bag ban affects six other grocery stores in the city: JJ&F Food Store in College Terrace, Andronico's at Stanford Shopping Center, Country Sun and Mollie's Stone Market on California Avenue, Whole Foods in downtown Palo Alto, and Safeway in Midtown.

As host store for the launch, Piazza's will give away free reusable totes till Friday. It is also distributing a shopper's "Reminder Kit" that includes a car decal of a cloth bag pleading "Don't leave me behind," sticky notes and signs bearing similar messages and a shopping-list refrigerator magnet. Other grocery stores will also display banners and distribute the reminder kits.

A Girl Scout troop drew reminder messages in chalk in Piazza's parking lot, and a video camera was set up for shoppers to record their advice on bringing bags.

The most common trick, it seems, is to carry a tote in one's vehicle.

"I leave my shopping bag in my car," Denise McGeary said. "I wouldn't be able to remember otherwise."

Piazza's shopper Scott Petersen also tries to leave two or three bags in the back of his car, and he hangs several bags on his front door knob as an instant reminder.

Gale Erlandson remembers by leaving her shopping bags in a set place. She says it is important to cultivate a habit, and placing bags close to one's purse or wallet might help.

According to a city news release, reusable bag use doubled from 9 to 18 percent at Palo Alto grocery stores and pharmacies between 2008 and 2009. The campaign, which will run till April 2010, aims to increase reusable bag usage to 30 percent by next February, a goal set by Palo Alto's Zero Waste Operational Plan.

Roberts said the city hopes to expand the plastic-bag ban to other businesses such as drugstores, after an environmental review of the impact has been completed. City staff will also explore the option of imposing a fee on paper bags to further encourage reusable bag use.

The city chose to launch its campaign this week to coincide with a larger Bay Area-wide effort sponsored by the Bay Area Recycling Outreach Coalition, a partnership of more than 100 cities in the nine Bay Area counties.

Palo Alto is not alone in banning plastic bags. San Francisco was the first U.S. city to pass similar legislation in 2007, and the San Jose City Council voted Tuesday to ban plastic bags beginning 2011.

Find this article at:
http://www.PaloAltoOnline.com/news/story.php?story_id=13928