



*Pippa Couvillion is not hard to spot on the road in her Toyota Prius.
photo by Chris Fritchie*

Frisco's Visionary Environmentalist

By Deborah Anderson

PIPPA COUVILLION. You may not be familiar with the name, but if you live in Frisco you see her fingerprints everywhere. As the Environmental Services Manager for the City of Frisco, Mrs. Couvillion helped make Frisco green before it was cool to be green.

Born and educated in England, Mrs. Couvillion moved to the United States in 1974 and became a U.S. citizen in 1998. In 1987 she started volunteering in Frisco. "I was driving my child to school one day, and I noticed a gigantic dump site off to the side of a country road. It was

about 10 feet tall and approximately 100 yards wide, with refrigerators, sofas and all kinds of waste that people just didn't want," she remembers. "The worst part was that I had paid a clean up crew to dispose of some trash from my home and I recognized it when they had illegally disposed a few of my things there without my knowledge." It was simultaneously an eyesore and a health hazard; so she contacted City Manager George Purefoy. With the help of city equipment and personnel, it took four days to clean up the pile that had slowly accumulated.

Mrs. Couvillion volunteered for the city until 1994 when city officials realized the incredible passion she had for the environment and they did not want to lose her. A part-time position was created so she could continue with the cause. In 1999 she was offered full-time employment as Environmental Services Manager. "I review all of the site plans for the city. Commercial properties that are more than 2,000 square feet are required to provide for waste and recycling," says Mrs. Couvillion who wrote the ordinance containing this requirement.

She is also a successful grant writer, securing more than half a million dollars in funds for the city in the past 11 years. On February 26, 2009, she was honored by the City of Frisco for 15 years of service.

Jeremy Starritt, environmental education coordinator for the past three years, is enthusiastic about his work and what his supervisor has done for the community. "She's the inspiration behind the entire department and a very dedicated boss. Wherever we go, people always remember Pippa. She's the lifeline of recycling here. She started it all and is the biggest promoter of environmental programs in the city."

Mrs. Couvillion says the mission of her team is, "To be dedicated, environmentally responsible stewards of our community and the earth." Her crew is responsible for educational outreach programs, residential trash collection and recycling services, electronic and household hazardous waste, commercial and construction waste and recycling services. There are other divisions within the environmental team, but these are the areas she manages. "There will always be a demand for recyclable materials. Our recycling vendor has a stable market for these products even in a tough economy," she said.

Curbside pickup of recyclables began in 1994 and area residents have come a long way from the days of roadside dumping. Pippa Couvillion urges citizens to think about supporting recycling industries where such facilities exist. "We need to expand our consciousness on how we buy products, and ask ourselves if the item

can be reused rather than just throwing it in the trash.”

Largely through Mrs. Couvillion’s efforts the City of Frisco now proudly recycles a minimum of 1,000 tons of material per month. That’s approximately 64 pounds of recyclables each month for each household. Thirty-nine percent of the city’s waste is recycled rather than being dumped in a landfill.

In 2001, Mrs. Couvillion developed a delightful educational outreach program for children, which includes characters such as Rufus the dog, Cari the blue recycling cart, and Buzz the bee, who keeps Frisco litter free. The “Keep Frisco Beautiful Pledge” found in the colorful education booklet “Rufus Helps Out,” is an effective way to encourage children to protect the environment. A special prize is sent to those who mail the pledge back to the city. These programs and others have brought Frisco recognition for Outstanding Public Education and are largely due to the efforts of Mrs. Couvillion. She is also one of the founders of Keep Frisco Beautiful, Adopt a Street and Don’t Trash Frisco.

The importance of keeping Frisco clean was brought home to Mrs. Couvillion when she came across a skunk in her neighborhood that had had a run-in with a piece of discarded trash. “I was out walking, when I found the skunk near a creek. It had a yogurt container stuck on its nose, and the poor thing couldn’t pull it off by itself.” After contemplating the potentially risky situation, she eventually gave in and pulled the carton off. “The frightened animal ran away from me. It probably would have died without my help.” Mrs. Couvillion mentioned that this kind of assistance to wild animals is not recommended, especially when the animal is a skunk. The point of her story, however, is how our discards can inadvertently hurt animals.

As part of her vision for the future, Pip-pa Couvillion’s biggest concern is air quality. She adds, “I’d like to see vehicles in general running on something cleaner, like compressed natural gas, electric or hybrid diesel in order to cut down on emissions. Our resources are too precious to waste. It’s very important to remember the balance of nature.”

Deborah Anderson is a freelance writer who lives in Frisco.



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