



Cleaning the planet ... one piece at a time



By Carissa Lee, 8th Grade and Charlotte Lee, 6th Grade, St. Rita School

We were curious to discover how using a smart Phone could help us clean the planet. We scurried up the hill to the "blue house" in San Rafael to meet Jeff Kirschner. Jeff is a former tech entrepreneur and the founder of a new company called Litterati, with a goal to create a litter-free planet. Litterati is an app where people take pictures of trash and the data is compiled into one map of the world. You take a picture of litter you find, recycle it, post it on Instagram, and hashtag Litterati. That information is received from people worldwide and is amalgamated (combined) into one big database on Litterati. It shows who picked up the trash, what it was, where it was found, and when it was found.

Jeff was inspired to make Litterati when walking with his two children in the Oakland hills. His 4 year-old daughter saw a tub of cat litter in a nearby creek. She also saw a cigarette butt. She said to her dad, "Dad, that doesn't belong there." Jeff told us that he felt sad and a bit angry when he saw that butt. He shot a photo of the butt and the picture looked great with all the editing that was available with Instagram. The idea of Litterati became more approachable. After about 10-15 photos were posted, the idea became really cool. His friends and family enjoyed his photos and gave him encouragement. Jeff realized he had all this info but nothing to do with it so he decided to take action. This is how Litterati was born.

Today, Jeff is focused on working with schools to incorporate Litterati. One school is currently taking just five minutes a day with their middle school to go out, take pictures of trash, and recycle them. The school is making an effective difference in their community every day. A future goal Jeff is striving for is to "build a wonderful curriculum that's in alignment with what schools are already doing." Jeff added that part of this program will focus on people becoming more aware of and changing their purchasing habits.

Today, 49 countries participate and over 1,000 pictures are posted each week.

Litterati is a creative tech program that allows schools to measure their own impact. Jeff emphasized, "I'd like to build something that 100 people love, rather than something that 10,000 just kind of like." He added his favorite Dr. Seuss quote, "It's not about what it is, it's about what it can become."

To those aspiring to help clean our world up he added, "No matter what you do, people will give you a million reasons why you shouldn't do it. You need persistence and must always stay true to your goals. Never give up."

As we walked out of the blue house, we realized how inspired we were. We began to pick up cigarette butts on the street and throw them away. Even though we have just done something small, we made a world of a difference. You can also make a difference no matter how big or small.

To learn more and take action yourself, visit Litterati.org



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