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Will Lafayette become a straw-free community?

By Pippa Fisher



From left, Darby Witherspoon and Chloe De Lancie. Photo provided

When will Lafayette reach the final straw? For co-founders of Central Contra Costa's Last Plastic Straw, Darby Witherspoon and Chloe De Lancie, they are hoping sooner rather than later.

The two are taking their message of education about the dangers and their goal of elimination of plastic straws to local city councils. In July Witherspoon and De Lancie spoke during the public comment period at the Lafayette City Council meeting, urging the city to place a discussion about plastic straw legislation on an upcoming agenda. To this end they will be presenting again to the September Environmental Task Force meeting.

De Lancie noted that the issue is tentatively expected to be on the Oct. 2 Walnut Creek City Council agenda. They will be talking at city council meetings this fall in Moraga and Orinda as well.

Both De Lancie and Witherspoon work at Crestwood Healing Center, a mental health facility in Pleasant Hill and 2016 Green Business of the Year award winner. De Lancie, who also serves as the sustainability coordinator at Crestwood, said that three and a half years ago the center started to take actions to reduce waste and save water and energy. Looking for both a bigger impact and also for ways to get residents involved and for them to give back to the community, De Lancie and Witherspoon decided on the issue of straws.

"Simple changes will reach more individuals," De Lancie says.

Given that the two only started working on this campaign in December 2017, less than a year ago, they have been remarkably impactful.

Currently De Lancie says that 12 locations in the county, including Buttercup Diners and Zachary's Pizza, have gone to either providing straws only upon request or by using compostable (paper) straws, or a combination of both of those.

Locally several businesses are on board, including the 2015 Cool California Award winner, Rising Loafer.

De Lancie and Witherspoon started their campaign by going door-to-door in the spring but quickly found it more effective to communicate with businesses via email. In April the two took the decision to push for local city and town ordinances.

In addition to talking to city councils, Witherspoon and De Lancie have been presenting their campaign to rotary clubs and schools.

"Children are very receptive to the message," says De Lancie. In fact at the Walnut Creek city meeting, she said, a couple of 7-year-olds also spoke, noting that Crestwood residents also attend the meetings.

De Lancie and Witherspoon are among the nominations for this year's Sustainable Contra Costa award.

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