

what can *you* do to help?

what if

Howard Hogue, known as Beach Santa, received attention from SC Living and went on to found a beach sweep crew along with Susan Hill Smith. photo // Hana Donnelly



get here at 6 a.m. I'm here for sunrise and do my walk whether I'm doing the beach, Ocean Boulevard, Municipal Park, wherever. I'll spend two to three hours doing it in the morning."

Still, he is one person. What difference can he really make?

In all probability, it's greater than you think.

"Last night, I picked up 387 pieces off the beach," Howard said, "137 cigarette butts."

That's just one beach visit -- no more than a few hours. And with such regular visits, results accumulate fast.

To give a better idea of this, Howard was once asked by Linda Rowe, his frequent partner in picking up trash, "how many items am I going to pick up between Jan. 1 and Memorial Day (final Monday of May)?" And I said 30,000. It ended up only 28 items short...

"...of 44,000 items picked up."

One person. What began as a personal project began to attract attention. He was featured in SC Living in December 2017, where he was first dubbed Beach Santa. He was thrilled, not for the recognition, but for the influence.

He also sparked the development of a weekly IOP beach cleanup crew over the summer -- the reporter who first wrote about Beach Santa, Susan Hill Smith, helped organize it following their interview. He participates at these cleanups on top of his solitary excursions. Last summer was the crew's second year of meeting every Monday from 5:30 to 6:30. (Anyone is welcome to come to just one or two cleanups.) Its final meeting was on Labor Day,

power to talk to people -- I get their attention pretty fast."

He wants the effort to be more than just him. As much as he does, there will always be trash on the beach if people keep putting it there. He can't solve the underlying problem himself.

Nobody can do it alone.

But why does he want to do it? Why does it matter? His go-to reason for reducing litter is that it can hurt people.

"The plastic will affect sea turtles," Howard said. "Sea turtles kill jellyfish. Jellyfish hurt people."

In a more direct sense, he describes finding a broken glass bottle. He was horrified -- "that could ruin someone's foot," he said. "Young people need to understand that what they're doing, the lack of respect, is going to affect their futures and their future families."

Perhaps that, more than anything else, is why Hogue is so reminiscent of good ol' Kris Kringle -- he works all year to create a safer, cleaner world for the little ones.

"I want this place to be nice for your generation, but [also] for your future generation. I want this place nice for your grandchildren..." he said. "We need to take the steps right now to be responsible, do the right thing."

Beach Santa is making a list and checking it twice -- a list full of straw wrappers and cigarette butts.



(Left) Hogue carries candy canes to hand out during his beach cleanups. (Below) Pictured is the trash that Hogue picks up on his trips to the Isle of Palms beach in hopes of alleviating pollution on the local beaches. photos // Hana Donnelly



Deck the halls, not the beaches

Hogue makes difference in cleaning up the coast

ROSEMARY DELAMATER | Co-Writing Editor

He may not be an actual resident of the North Pole. But with his white beard, jolly temperament, red "uniform" and several boxes of candy canes, it would be an easy mistake to make. But Howard Hogue, otherwise known as Beach Santa, is hard at work all year, not just on Christmas Eve.

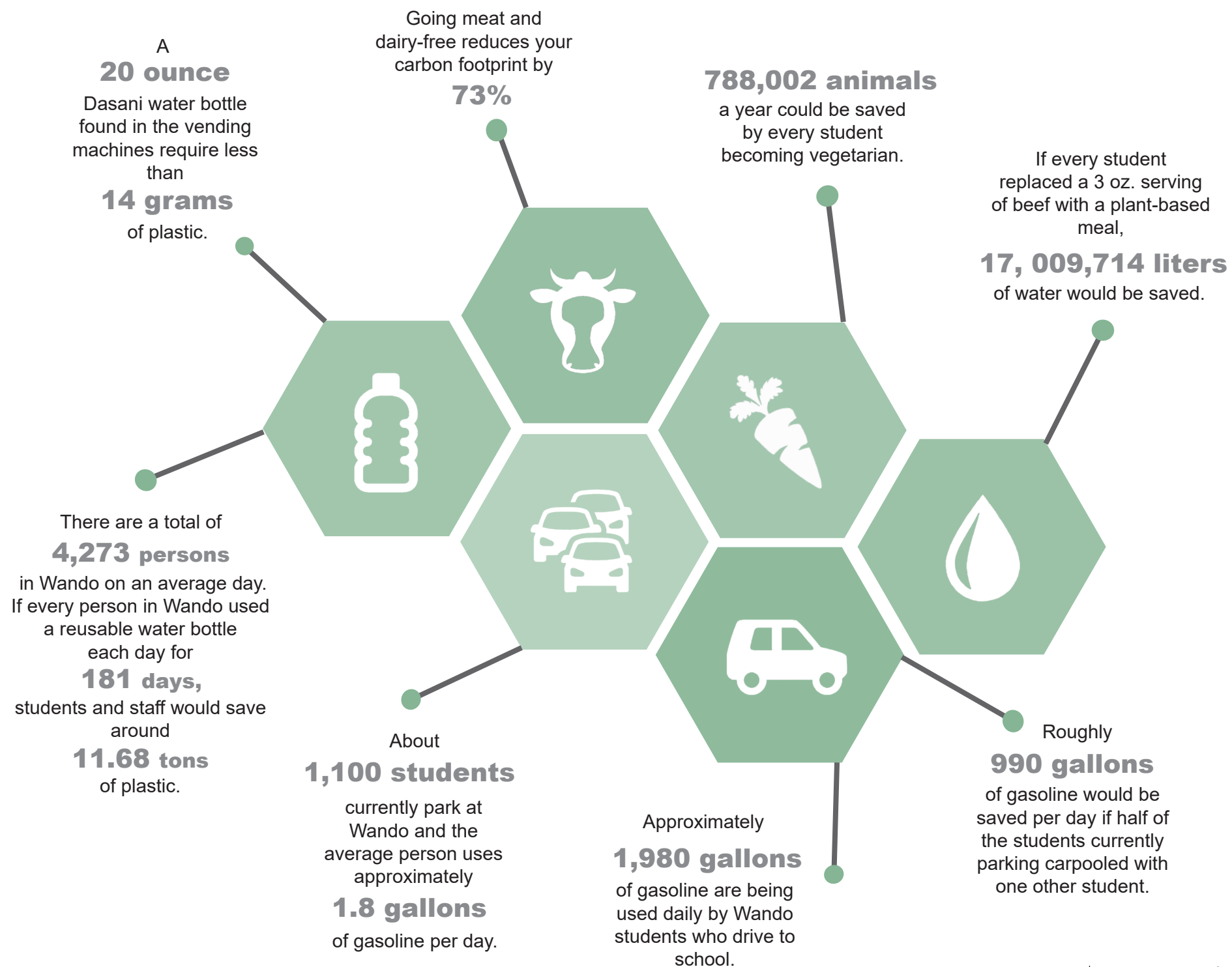
It was never his plan to get so involved with beach cleanup.

"I came down here [from Maryland] three summers ago to come to the beach and enjoy myself," Howard said. "But when I got to the beach, I said to myself, 'there's a lot of litter!' And so I started picking it up, and it got to the point that I couldn't carry it. So I got myself a bucket, and then my back was getting me so I got a grabber."

Howard does this at least twice a week, typically on the Isle of Palms beach. It's no small effort.

"I'll get up at 4:30," Howard said. "I have the car packed at 5:00, leave the house at 5:00,

Howard's goal is not just to pick up trash himself -- instead, "I'm trying to educate people," he said, "being Beach Santa gives me that



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