

FEATURE

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Caring, Cleaning and Coffee

Starbucks employees are doing their part to care for our planet

HAMILTON - June 12, 2024 - When April Johnson first started studying at McMaster University in 2021, her primary goal as a wide-eyed freshman was to make an impact. “I have always had a passion for helping others,” she says. “It makes me feel good and I just want other people to feel the same.”

Despite having a busy schedule, Johnson has made humanitarianism the heart of everything she does. Between studying and working part-time at Starbucks, she always makes time for organizing bottle drives or volunteering at her local animal shelter.

“Animals, specifically, have a special place in my heart,” she says. “I believe they inspire humanity to be a little more compassionate.”

Johnson picks up a piece of trash and tosses it in her already nearly full garbage bag, despite only having traveled a fraction of the way down Burlington Beach. One of her fellow Starbucks employees places an empty soda can into Johnson’s bag.

Starbucks is one of the leading brands specializing in fair trade and environmentally friendly coffee. Currently, they hold the number one spot for most organic coffee sold

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on a global scale. Starbucks encourages their employees to internalize their prioritization of sustainability, something Johnson and her colleagues have taken to heart.

“Johnson first proposed doing community cleanups as a team building exercise,” explains Starbucks manager Jesse Lam. “I wasn’t sure if the staff would be interested, but this is the third one we’ve done in two months!”

The Hamilton-based Starbucks team reports that over the last several months, they have collected over 35 bags worth of trash across multiple locations. The disturbing number has caused Johnson’s idea to spread to several other GTA Starbucks locations, inspiring other staff to make changes within their community.

Johnson goes on to explain that her idea stemmed from Starbucks’ recent collaboration with National Geographic, a non-profit organization that focuses on wildlife exploration and preservation. The organization uses media such as magazines, television and radio to showcase the natural beauty and wonder of the world.

“I loved National Geographic as a kid,” Johnson gushes. “I used to sit in front of the TV every evening and learn about a new type of wild animal.”

Johnson picks up another piece of trash, a KitKat wrapper buried in the sand.

“The day I found out Starbucks was working with them, I went home and watched a few episodes. It creeped me out how much trash was in the water with the fish, or how many birds thought candy bar wrappers were food.”

The collaboration with National Geographic centres around raising awareness of endangered animals, as well as collecting financial donations that will be put towards

preserving the lives and habitats of said endangered creatures. For every cup of coffee sold, one dollar will be donated to NG's wildlife preservation program. Starbucks is also releasing a limited edition mug, where in which all proceeds will be donated towards the initiative.

Fighting for our future

As an Environmental Sciences major at McMaster, Johnson uses her knowledge from her previous three years of schooling to inform her humanitarianism. She goes on to explain that the more she learns in her classes, the deeper her passion for saving lives and the planet grows.

"It keeps me going, knowing all of this information about the environment," she says.

"If we don't fight for our planet now, we won't have a planet to fight for."

Johnson is in the midst of founding a new club at the university, one in which the group will host events and fundraisers similar to the beach cleanup day with her Starbucks colleagues.

"I know so many other people who feel the same way I do, and who want to make a change," she says. "I am so grateful I have a group of people with whom I can help the planet, and I want to bring even more people together to do the same."

The new club will be called "Earth Responders", and will aim to meet every second Saturday of the month to embark on a new environmental journey. Johnson has already received some pledges from her co-workers to join Earth Responders for the 2024 Fall Semester.

"It really is a pleasure to work with somebody so passionate," says Jane Smith, one of

Johnson's colleagues. "I am so excited to help Johnson with this new project!"

To learn more about Starbucks' collaboration with Natural Geographic, and how you can participate in the conversation, visit www.starbucks.com/naturalgeographichelps.



Johnson (right) picking up beach trash with co-worker Emily Tran (left).