Known as “Old Pushbroom,” he spent 40 years on his crusade

By Jason Buch

During a 1947 trip to Switzerland, Otto Philip “O.P.” Schnabel wrote a muchquoted letter to a friend back in San Antonio that would alter the way residents of this city and across the state viewed beautification, littering and personal responsibility.

The letter, penned on a bit of trash or papers on the streets and roads, wrote Schnabel, a life insurance salesman:

“They have neat contain ers in every block, and around the grounds of hotels everything is so clean that you would feel like a ‘dirty dog’ to drop any litter. If God gives me enough time and strength, I resolve to dedicate myself to work towards making San Antonio the cleanest and most beautiful city in America.”

For the next 40 years, Schnabel did just that, changing fundamentally how San Antonio addressed public sanitation. Schnabel saw an opportunity to make San Antonio one of the cleanest or neatest in the nation despite the lack of municipal services and an attitude among many residents that they weren’t responsible for the cleanliness of public spaces and their own property.

Schnabel was born in 1896 in Ottine, near Gon tinio that would alter the way residents of this city and across the state viewed beautification, littering and personal responsibility.

“You do not see a lot of trash on the streets and roads,” Schnabel wrote in 1947.

In 1950, city officials gave him a blanket citation a clean city and the most beautiful city in America.”

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O．P． Schnabel, a local businessman and community leader, is shown with his trademark lapel button and push broom in the 1960s. Schnabel won national awards for his efforts to beautify San Antonio. He died in 1979.

O．P． Schnabel married Lillian Butler Findlay in 1937．According to Express-News....

Schnabel became the founding president of the San Antonio Story, a marketing guru in San Antonio. The council eventually became Keep Texas Beautiful, an affiliate of Keep America Beautiful.

Schnabel was considered a local hero. “He was a real standard bearer and is deeply involved with educational programs at the grade-school level that promote litter prevention, beautification and waste reduction,” said Stan Weik, a member of the San Antonio Story, an affiliate of Keep America Beautiful. To- day, Schnabel's legacy lives on in a building named after him on the Northwest Side.

“Schnabel was the driving force and one of the founding fathers of the Beautify Texas Council,” said Stan Weik, a San Antonio native who now serves as the city manager of San Antonio and an executive member of the Keep Texas Beautiful board. “He has a massive legacy in San Antonio, but also throughout the state of Texas and the nation. His programs have been very influential.

Schnabel's life and work are chronicled in "Old Pushbroom," a biography he wrote in 1966. He died in 1979 at age 83. Schnabel was so well known for his work that he was even hung a miniature push broom on his tie chain. He would ask crowds, “Do you want to be a dirty, stinking, contemptible litterbug, or do you want to be a beauty bug?”

“Schnabel was so well-known he received letters simply addressed to ‘O．P． Pushbroom,’ ‘Mr． Cleaning,’ ‘Mr． Beautification’,” according to his biography in The San Antonio Story.

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