

KATHLEEN MERRYMAN

Save us all money by calling posters of illegal signs

KATHLEEN MERRYMAN; THE NEWS TRIBUNE

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If you drive anywhere in Pierce County, there are a few things you know for sure.

Lisa Buys Houses.

You can Lose Weight Fast, take advantage of Free Junk Car Hauling and Rent To Own Move Today!

Whether we've needed movers, carpet cleaning, roofing or fast cash for ugly houses, all we've had to do was keep our eyes trained on rights of way and utility poles.

There are a couple of problems with that system. First, we should be looking at the road, not jotting down the number that will make us \$8,000 a week working from home.

And those signs are illegal. They are safety hazards and visual litter.

Pierce County long ignored those who flouted sign ordinances, but that's changed. Since Feb. 15, the county has been enforcing the rules banning signs in rights of way.

It even gave offenders a dry run last July and August. Crews picked up signs but stored them. People who had broken the law could reclaim their signs, learn why they were illegal and be warned that this year, the removals would be for real.

That has not gone down well with some real estate professionals who had gotten into the habit of planting signs in the right of way.

They've been dismayed to learn that their signs, even the \$25 placards on \$50 wood supports, have been hauled to recycling.

Sure, the laws were on the book, one agency owner complained to News Tribune real estate reporter Devona Wells, but the county hadn't enforced them before. Doing so now isn't good for business in a slow market.

Ask yourself if that's the kind of reasoning you want from a professional handling what's likely to be the biggest financial commitment of your life.

Bruce Wagner, Pierce County's road operations division manager, graciously agreed to meet with Realtors.

It was in everyone's interest.

Agents got guidelines on how to place signs legally. Generally, utility poles and boxes back onto the private property line. Put a sign behind them, and crews probably won't pick it up.

Taxpayers win when a sign can stay put.

Wagner has two full-time people on a removal crew and one full-time employee in the office recording the signs.

He calculates that we pay an average of \$12 to remove one sign. Since Feb. 15, we've spent \$25,000 to get rid of 2,100 of them.

Of those, 55 percent were real estate-related. The rest were hawking diets, hypnosis, get-rich-quick schemes and the like.

Of the real estate signs, about half were from traditional agencies. Half were less formal placards on utility poles or in rights of way. Think of the Lisa who buys houses.

Wagner's crew has done a remarkable job. Roadways through Parkland, Spanaway, Graham, Frederickson, Midland, Orting, Gig Harbor and Purdy have been de-junked. He's getting calls from residents thanking him for the visible difference.

Some callers want to help.

That's tricky.

"Working in the right of way is a really dangerous thing," he said.

His crews wear hard hats and reflective vests and have traffic control.

Plus, the people who put these signs up are no amateurs.

The triple cluster of Avoid Foreclosure, Moving? Low Rates and Ca\$h for Houses placards is a good 10 feet up a utility pole at 72nd Street East and Waller Road. People use ladders and hi-lifters to affix them with industrial staples, Wagner said.

Getting the mess down is a job for the pros.

The rest of us can hold the litterers accountable. I'm irked at Lisa and her ilk and the \$12 a sign they're costing us. That money would be better spent filling potholes.

They're wasting our money. We can return the favor.

Leave the signs where they are, but jot down numbers and call them.

Tell Lisa Buys Houses and the others what you think of their predatory littering. Do so at length. Time, like litter, is money.

Here's a start: Lisa's number is 253-926-0024.

Kathleen Merryman: 253-597-8677

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READERS COMMENTS:

Thanks Kathleen!!

Submitted by [Puyallup83](#) on April 2, 2008 - 2:54pm.

They were out this morning ripping down the signs...even the ones 15 feet up!! My neighborhood looks so much better! I never saw a sign myself that said "Lisa Buys Houses", but there were plenty of other foreclosure type signs, signs advertisig services, and signs for wreight loss. They're gone now! Keep up the good work, Kathleen.

"personal vendetta because

Submitted by [hiccup1234](#) on March 31, 2008 - 8:28pm.

"personal vendetta because she did not like it that the one of the signs was in her neighborhood" Oh please! LBH signs win in both the 'least artistic', as well as the 'most frequently spotted within Unincorporated Pierce County' categories. They are illegal, predatory and constitute a safety hazard when in close proximity to intersections, which they almost always are.

Thank you Kathleen

Submitted by [gorgeuz](#) on March 31, 2008 - 5:09pm.

Not only have you helped me out many times, but the streets can feel alittle cleaner with this article.

Lisa Buys Houses; Lisa Clutters our Community

Submitted by [B_Olsen](#) on March 31, 2008 - 4:39pm.

Kathleen Merryman concludes her column by inviting folks to call the number on the "Lise Buys Houses" sign. I called. The gentleman who answered the phone said that it was unfortunate that Kathleen Merryman wrote the article and that she wrote it as a personal vendetta because she did not like it that the one of the signs was in her neighborhood. He also asserted that Kathleen Merryman had been reprimanded by the News Tribune for writing the article because his company is a consistent advertiser in the paper, spending \$10,000-15,000.

He concluded by saying that his company works to help people in the community who are facing foreclosure and that by providing this valuable service to the community he is helping to keep property values from decreasing further.

I doubt if I was the only caller who heard his well-crafted public relations statement. I don't believe his imaginative claims about Merryman's vendetta and that the paper wants to muzzle Merryman's criticism of his company in order to protect their advertising dollars. Even if I believe his claim about Merryman's supposed reprimand (which I don't), the fact remains that the signs are illegal. Thanks to Kathleen Merryman for drawing more attention to this issue. Thanks to Bruce Wagner and his team at Pierce County for removing the signs. Thanks to those who join me in continuing to call the numbers posted on the illegal signs to let them know that we don't appreciate their distracting, ugly, scofflaw cluttering of our community.

Who is to blame, and who should pay to fix it?

Submitted by [S_Emerson](#) on March 31, 2008 - 11:58am.

I so appreciate Kathleen Merryman's coverage of this issue.

I have to say though:

Sign laws in unincorporated Pierce County, whether advertising houses for sale or teriyaki lunch specials, PROHIBIT off-site advertisement signs PERIOD (with the exception of licensed billboards), so the thousands of off-site signs removed by Public Works were all illegal, therefore should rightfully have been removed--AND, since off-site signage on private property is also illegal, they too MUST be removed.

Public Works saying that putting the signs behind utility poles and boxes will keep them from being removed is referring ONLY to for-sale T-sign's located ON the private property portion of THE home for sale. This does NOT apply to Lisa Buys Houses signs or the hundreds of development directional signs - unless of course Lisa has one sign directly on the property which she uses to conduct her business, or, as code permits, a development sign is located directly in front of the development which it is advertising (and again, ONLY if it is located ON the private property portion) - and ONLY after applying for, and receiving a permit through PALS.

This is an excerpt from Bruce Wagner (Public Works) to Brian Ziegler (Director of Public Works) in response to my request for an update on the illegal sign-removal program (received on Monday, March 24, 2008):

"Per your voicemail, a follow up to Stacy Emerson's sign removal requests.... some data from the program thus far. 1,900+ since Feb 15th, plus the 4,200 during the pilot. We have spent about \$23,000 on this effort in 2008, and about \$37K last year."

Now, I understand Louise Olson's complaint voiced through her letter to the editor (March 30) about taxpayer dollars being used to remove illegally placed signs. The fact is, the offenders should be paying for the removal of their illegal signs—not the taxpayers. Given the numbers provided by Bruce Wagner, sixty-thousand taxpayer dollars were used, when yet if the allowable citations were issued we'd be looking at this instead:

If signs laws were fully enforced:

Fines on 4,200 illegally placed signs (during the pilot) -----	1,050,000.00
Fines on 1,900 illegally placed signs (since 02-15-08) -----	475,000.00

Cost of removal -----	- 60,000.00

Potential "extra" revenue lost due to lack of enforcement --- \$1,465,000.00

So, to Ms. Olson and others who are resistant to the clean-up effort, I ask you to consider the following points:

- 1) Illegally placed signs (by the thousands) blight our communities.
- 2) An average of 55% belong to the real-estate and development industries.
- 3) Although illegal sign offenders have been allowed to violate the signs laws for decades, this does not grant a license to continue the practice.
- 4) The County's recent efforts to resolve the problem is a result of citizens insisting the sign laws be enforced as a "tool" to free communities from blight.

5) Citizens will continue to insist the County fully enforce the sign law(s) AND to issue allowable fines to offenders.

6) There is no requirement for pre-notification of law enforcement "sweeps" – and our County Code is indeed "law".

7) The Tacoma Pierce County Association of Realtors Government Affairs liaison Catherine Rudolph was involved in the 2-year long process with the County (as was PC MBA's spokesperson, Tiffany Spier). If folks are upset with anyone for not informing them (or their industry members) that a sweep was going down, then perhaps they should be upset with Catherine, or the TPCAR, rather than with our local government—or—how about getting upset with The News Tribune for not doing a better job in covering the issue - for example, by adding into this article that off-site signs are NOT allowed even on private property. They could also be upset with themselves for choosing to be ignorant of the law.

8) With 55% of the illegal signs removed being signs belonging to the RE and dev industry, surely these industries must admit that they are to blame for this problem more so than any other industry (as these two industries do not make up for 55% of the working population of Pierce County).

9) These two industries' need to sell their products to put milk on their table is no greater than the need of ANY other industry who has to sell their product to put milk on their table--and--if everyone were to violate sign laws to the degree which these two industries have, and does, would Ms. Olson's letter to the editor instead be about how visibility to their illegal signs are being blocked by someone else's illegal signs? Or would it be about how they can't sell houses because the neighborhoods they're in look so crappy because they're blighted with thousands of illegal signs?

I'll close with a collage of illegal signs found along Canyon Road and 176th Street—none of which are the T-post signs, and not a one is located on-site, but rather are located blocks, some even miles, from the sales site.

I'd like to know other citizen feelings on how you think these signs make our communities look.

Stacy Emerson, founder
Pierce County Street Spam Eradication Campaign

See larger image [here](#).

